

Appendix 1



A Respectful and Sustainable Service for the Bereaved

A Strategy for the Bereavement Services in RCT

2024 – 2034

Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council



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INTRODUCTION:

County Borough Councillor Robert Harris

Cabinet Member for Public Health and Communities



I welcome you to the first strategy for Bereavement Services operated by Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council. This strategy sets out our commitment to the maintenance and development of high-quality bereavement services in the County over the medium term.

Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council offers a high quality, comprehensive bereavement service with two crematoriums and fourteen cemeteries within our boundaries. The service has always aimed to provide an efficient and respectful service that meets the needs of the bereaved.

This strategy identifies the evolving changes in health and safety, environmental requirements, and social attitudes in bereavement services. It identifies the potential impact these changes may have on service demand in the future. The strategy also outlines a plan of action to further assess and respond to the changing demands and expectations on the service over the coming years. Finally, there is an outline of how we will measure the quality of the service, and the outcomes of the developments implemented, as a result of this strategy.

In times of public sector economic uncertainty, this strategy will enable the Council to focus and plan investment where it is most needed and where it can have the greatest positive impact on the quality and efficiency of the service for our residents.

This strategy supports the Council's Corporate Plan "Working with our Communities" 2024-2030 and the Council's purpose "To provide community leadership and deliver high quality public services, working alongside residents, communities and our partners so that people, businesses, and the environment can thrive and prosper."

Bereavement Services is critical in supporting the wellbeing of people and communities affected by bereavement. The service also supports a wide range of local independent funeral directors and enables these local businesses to provide employment in the area. This strategy identifies the key role the service can undertake in supporting and enhancing the natural environment and increasing biodiversity across our cemeteries. The service also maintains historical records and monuments and is committed to increasing the accessibility of our heritage through digitalisation and promotion as part of the Council's Heritage Strategy.

I would like to commend the team at Bereavement Services for the work carried out to prepare this strategy and look forward to working with our Bereavement Service to maintain and enhance this essential service in achieving its goals.

Executive Summary:

This is the first formal strategy for Rhondda Cynon Taf (RCT) Bereavement Services. The service is focused on 2 crematoria and chapel facilities within the County Borough and the maintenance of 14 cemeteries. Current services include earthen burials, cremations, public health funerals and memorial services. The service works very closely with other partners including funeral directors, the NHS, and Medical Referees/Examiners and has direct communication with local authority bereavement services across Wales.

The performance data illustrates the RCT Bereavement Services is a consistently high performing service, and projections suggest that the volume of business is likely to increase.

The document explores the current and projected external environment within which the service operates. It highlights the evolution and changes in legislation, environmental standards, and population demand for specific services. It also highlights a number of areas within the service that would benefit from a proactive, focused approach over the medium term to maintain and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the service. These include graveyard capacity and sustainable environmental management of the land, the provision of leases and memorials, workforce development, increased financial efficiency, and digital services.

The document sets out a clear vision for the service that encapsulates its core values of dignity, equality, inclusion, safety, and sustainability. It also demonstrates how the implementation of these values contributes to the strategic aims in the Corporate Plan for 2024-2039 “Working with our Communities”. [The Council's Corporate Plan | Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council \(rctcbc.gov.uk\)](https://www.rctcbc.gov.uk)

An initial 5-year Action Plan has been identified for the service that outlines the areas of service that it intends to review and change where necessary and appropriate, to ensure that it remains fit for purpose and able to adapt to the changing environment. The key actions are:

- Review and update the services offered and the fees and charges, taking into consideration the needs and expectations of the bereaved, other local authority and private sector provision.
- Invest as appropriate in building and equipment to ensure that legislative and environmental standards are met and that the service is fit for purpose over the medium term.
- Support staff training and development to ensure statutory requirements are met and support a future skilled workforce, including introducing apprenticeships.
- Develop approaches to land usage and maintenance that are financially and environmentally sustainable
- Develop the digital, information, heritage, and marketing services.

The service has established a reputation for high quality services over many years through repeated high scoring external inspections. The Council will continue to be accountable for the standard of service against national benchmarks and inspections.

SECTION 1: Background.

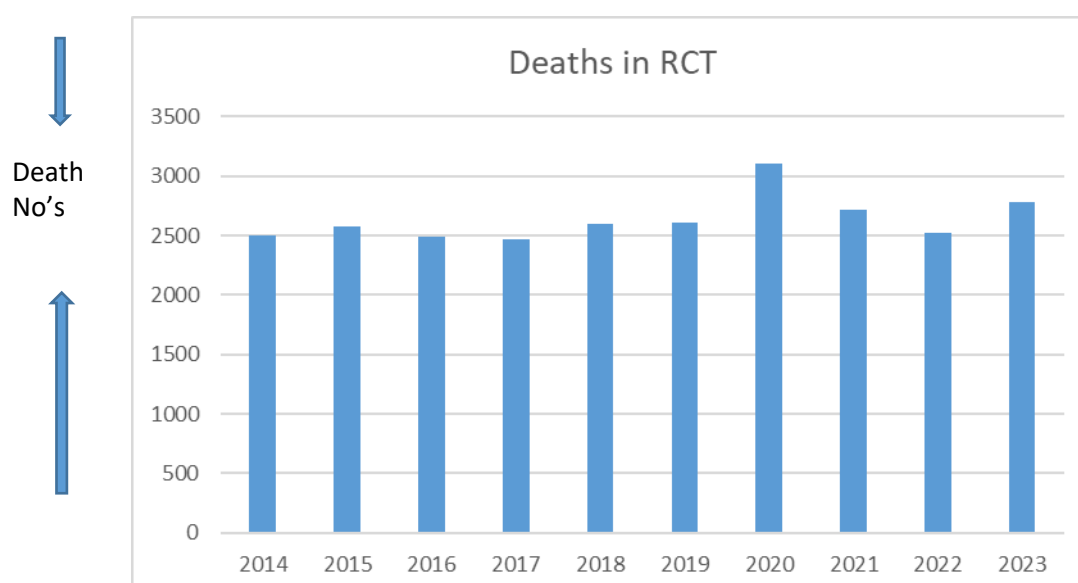
Context of Bereavement services in RCT:

Social attitudes to funeral services are constantly evolving. The provision of Bereavement Services is an area that requires considerable forward planning to ensure that the service is able to provide a sustainable burial and cremation service and provide continual memorial opportunities for bereaved families. In addition, the service needs to plan for the future in order for the service to adapt to the needs and expectations of the bereaved and the wider diverse community.

Local Authorities have been the main service provider in the UK for both Burial and Cremation services over the past 120 years. This is in addition to the historical provision of burial service provision by the Church Authority through Local Parish churchyards. Over the last 50 years, we have seen the rapid decline in the Church Authority developing and providing land for burial provision. This has resulted in Local Authorities continuing to develop land in order to meet the continual demand for burial. In addition, during the same period the demand for cremation has increased significantly with the Local Authorities being the main provider.

The pandemic period during 2020/21 caused changes in attitudes towards funeral services particularly around cremations, service content, digitalisation, attendance, and ways of celebrating lives. In addition, there is increasing competition from the private sector.

With the exception of the pandemic year 2020 the number of deaths in RCT has remained reasonably static, although with an aging population the numbers are projected to increase slowly over time.

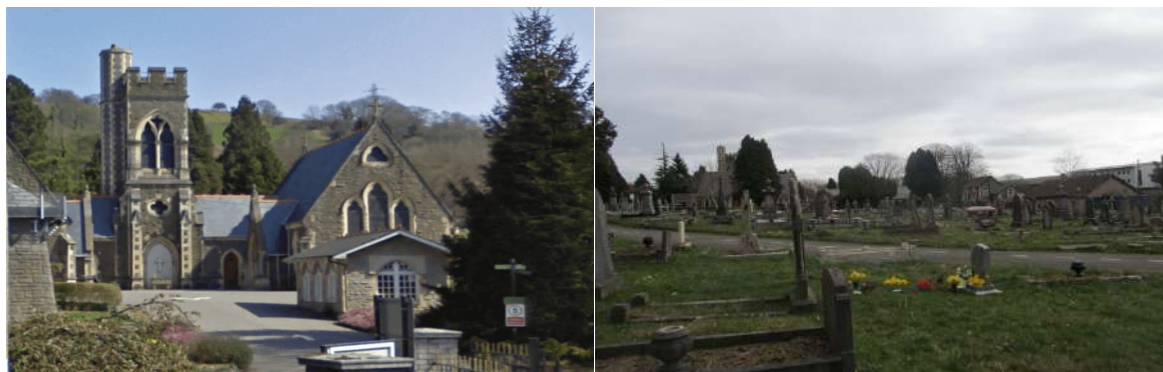


Data supplied by Office for National Statistics. [Deaths registered summary statistics, England and Wales - Office for National Statistics](#)

Current Facilities:

Glyntaff Crematorium:

Gyntaff was the first crematorium to open in Wales in 1924 and celebrated its centenary in 2024. The chapel and crematorium are located within the cemetery area, off Cemetery Road, Glyn Taff. There are two chapels which can host 60 seated visitors each, and there is adjacent car parking for 50 cars. The chapels were last refurbished in 2018 to include a wide range of digital services. The chapels were built in 1875 and require a programme of restoration work to the interior and external facades. There is disabled access to both chapels and individual seating to allow for the re-configuration of the chapel if required. There are toilet and disabled toilet facilities, baby changing facilities, and limited disabled parking. Glyntaff Crematorium is also home to a columbarium, designed to house cremated remains on temporary deposit in the 1930's as it was only possible to scatter cremated remains at that time. The building also houses some of our more prestigious commemorative plaques for those who fell in both World Wars. The roof is Cornish slate, and the building has been renovated and listed due to its unique design and function.



Llwydcoed Crematorium:

The chapel and crematorium are located at Ty Newydd, Llwydcoed and was opened in 1970. There are extensive grounds and gardens, and two chapels. Capel Mair can accommodate up to 120 visitors and Capel Tydfil has a capacity of 50 people. The chapels have received recent refurbishment work to the listed buildings, with the inclusion of digital facilities. There is also a chapel of remembrance for visitors. Llwydcoed Crematorium is operated on a consortium basis with Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council and managed by a joint committee of both authorities. The crematorium has disabled access, good parking facilities, toilets and disabled toilet facilities, and baby change facilities.



Both crematoria facilities are inspected three yearly by FBCA and the results published nationally. Both Glyntaff and Llwydcoed crematoria scored over 90% in the 2024 inspections with only environmental factors highlighted as areas for potential improvement

Cemeteries:

There are 14 cemeteries within RCT, 4 in the Rhondda valley, 4 in the Taff area, and 6 in the Cynon valley. All cemeteries offer new graves, except for Abercynon cemetery that can only offer re-opened graves and a closed cemetery at Aberffrwd. RCTCBC currently offers exclusive use of full earthen graves and cremated remains burials for 100 years.

Current Services:

RCT Council offer the following services:

- Earthen burials in lawn graves (headstone only)
- Earthen burials in traditional graves (full memorial)
- Re – open burials with funeral service
- Multi- faith burials
- Bricked/lined graves (at additional cost)
- Cremations with service
- Direct cremations, no service
- Baby cremations
- Visual tributes and slide shows at cremations
- Memorial plots
- Keepsake digital recordings
- Memorial records

All Cemeteries and Crematoriums are available to visit by residents and visitors with details on our council website: [Cemetery locations and opening hours | Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council](#)

SunLife's 2022 Cost of Dying report ([3062_COD_Cost of Dying Report_2022_V7](#)) shows that direct cremation has risen from 3% in 2019 to 18% in 2021. These findings show that direct cremations have risen 500% in popularity over a two-year period. There are growing numbers of families who are choosing not to hold a traditional funeral, preferring to hold a service or event without the urgency of the usual timeframe of a funeral.

Legislative Requirements:

Under the Local Government Act 1972 and the Orders made thereunder, including the Local Authorities Cemeteries Order 1977 (LACO77) a Local Authority may provide and maintain cemeteries inside or outside of its area. This legislation also requires a Local Authority to keep in good order and repair any cemetery that they are responsible for together with the walls, buildings and fences thereon and any other buildings provided. Section 4 of the Cremation Act 1902 provides that a Burial Authority's powers to

provide and maintain burial grounds or cemeteries or anything ancillary or incidental to the provision of cemeteries shall be deemed to extend to the provision and maintenance of crematoria. The above legislation provides for a local authority to own and operate cemeteries and crematoria and charge such fees as they see fit.

In addition to this, the legislation extends to statutory requirements for keeping registers for burial and cremation together with site plans. Therefore, it is not a statutory requirement for a local authority to directly provide cremation and/or burial facilities, however, no authority of this size could fail to make provision for the disposal of the dead.

A £500 grant is automatically given to relatives of a deceased child under 18 years old towards memorial costs, with burial and cremation services provided free of charge for any person under 18 years of age in accordance with current Welsh Government arrangements.

The cremation of human remains is also governed by the Environmental Protection Act 1990 (EPA1990) with regard to emissions from cremator operation. The level of emissions must be recorded to allow annual certification by the local Environmental Health office. Crematoria across England & Wales have been required to abate emissions of Mercury by 50% (of 2003 levels) since 31 December 2012. There has been a requirement by the national regulatory body for 100% mercury abatement since 2020.

Future legislative proposals include the replacement of Medical Referees who currently authorise all cremations. The Medical Referee role will continue for some yet undisclosed period and the fee of £18.70 per form authorised will continue to be met by the Local Authority. The Medical Examiner system was rolled out to include deaths in the community on 9th September 2024 and plans to replace the current Medical Referee system over time, although a medical referee is still required by statute for all crematoria. This will impact on the amount and type of information provided to crematoria. It has been confirmed that there will be no fees payable to the Medical Examiner by the local authority.

2027 will likely see new legislation for crematoria to abate nitrogen dioxins (NOX). The legislation will require additional equipment to be installed on each cremator in addition to the flue gas treatment to reduce mercury emissions from dental amalgam. The current flue gas treatment does not remove nitrogen oxides (NOX), so more recently some equipment providers have started to provide a NOX abatement option using a process of selective non-catalytic reduction (SNCR). Use of this technique whilst currently limited is becoming more widespread and is referred to as “NOX abatement”.

SECTION 2: The Current Operating Environment.

Performance Trends:

Number of Burials and cremations in RCT facilities 2017 -2023

Total Activity

| | TAFF AREA | | | | RHONDDA AREA | | | | CYNON AREA | | | | | | |
|--------------------|--------------|---------------|-------------|-----------------|--------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|-----------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|----------------|
| | Glyntaff Cem | Llanharan Cem | Ty Rhiw Cem | Cefn Y Pard Cem | Treorchy Cem | Trealaw Cem | Penrhys Cem | Ferndale Cem | Aberdare Cem | Abercynon Cem | Maesyrarian Cem | Brynygaer cem | Ynysybwl Cem | Aberfrwd Cem | Llwydcoed pots |
| 2017 | 238 | 26 | 17 | 87 | 155 | 196 | 86 | 50 | 129 | 34 | 115 | 31 | 29 | 0 | 212 |
| 2018 | 219 | 24 | 16 | 93 | 170 | 201 | 89 | 41 | 139 | 24 | 147 | 35 | 20 | 0 | 203 |
| 2019 | 215 | 30 | 22 | 78 | 138 | 169 | 79 | 51 | 134 | 44 | 95 | 30 | 28 | 0 | 196 |
| 2020 | 184 | 15 | 16 | 72 | 157 | 188 | 71 | 51 | 118 | 37 | 122 | 23 | 25 | 0 | 181 |
| 2021 | 251 | 24 | 20 | 113 | 136 | 221 | 80 | 55 | 131 | 28 | 105 | 33 | 19 | 0 | 192 |
| 2022 | 175 | 32 | 23 | 89 | 142 | 176 | 81 | 43 | 130 | 29 | 118 | 38 | 26 | 0 | 162 |
| 2023 | 192 | 24 | 16 | 91 | 155 | 179 | 68 | 48 | 140 | 36 | 112 | 33 | 19 | 0 | 183 |
| Totals by cemetery | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 1474 | 175 | 130 | 623 | 1053 | 1330 | 554 | 339 | 921 | 232 | 814 | 223 | 166 | 0 | 1329 |

| | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 |
|----------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Number of burials | 1405 | 1421 | 1309 | 1260 | 1408 | 1264 | 1296 |
| Number of cremations | 3311 | 3245 | 3005 | 3544 | 2742 | 2469 | 2609 |

Data sourced from Bereavement Services records

Demand Trends:

In Rhondda Cynon Taf, the population size has increased by 1.4%, from around 234,400 in 2011 to 237,700 in 2021. There has been an increase of 16.3% in people aged 65 years and over, a decrease of 1.9% in people aged 15 to 64 years, and a

| <u>Number of Cremations at each Crematorium</u> | | |
|---|-----------------|------------------|
| | <u>GLYNTAFF</u> | <u>LLWYDCOED</u> |
| 2017 | 1549 | 1690 |
| 2018 | 1453 | 1788 |
| 2019 | 1390 | 1610 |
| 2020 | 1641 | 1903 |
| 2021 | 1235 | 1505 |
| 2022 | 1119 | 1349 |
| 2023 | 1250 | 1359 |

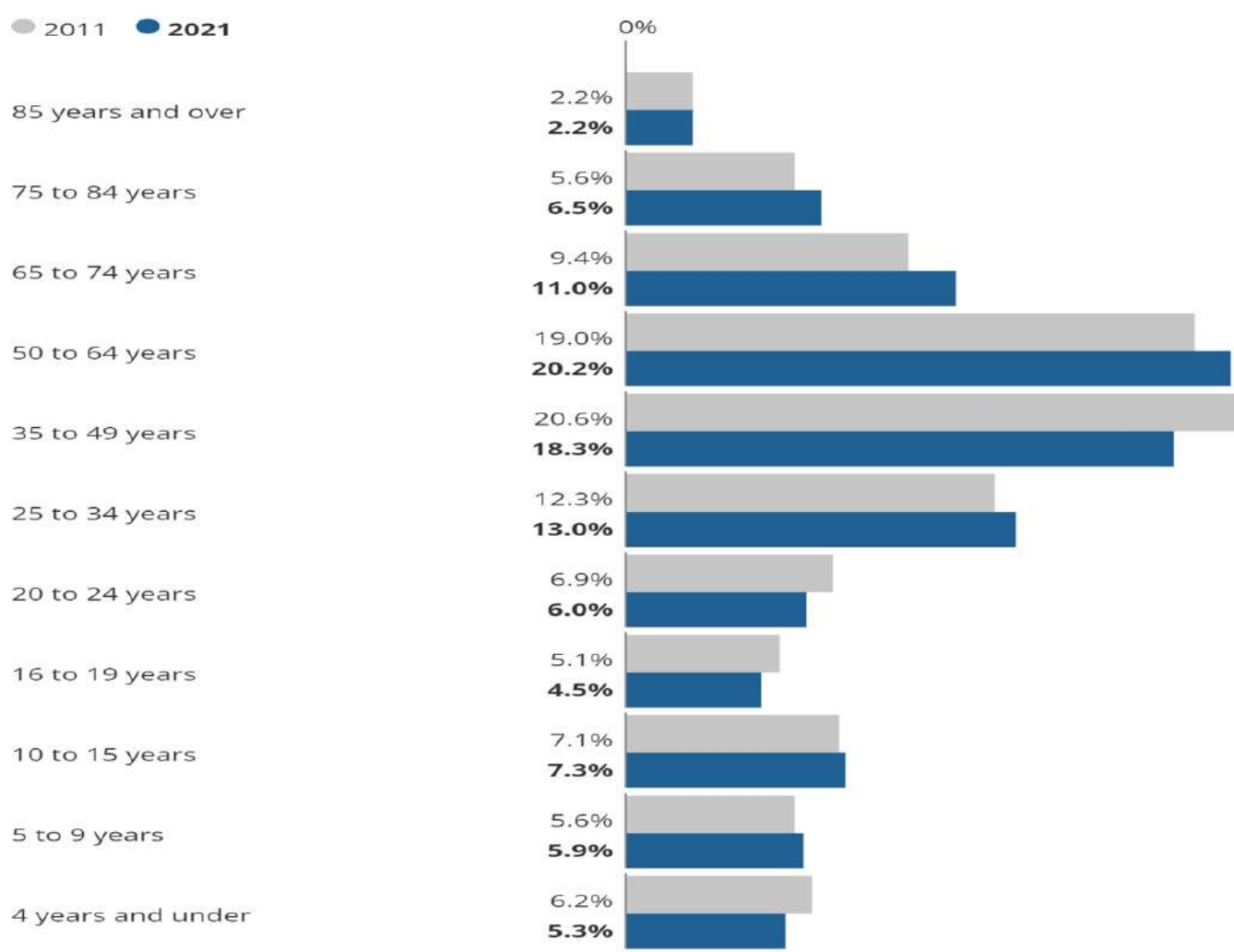
decrease of 1.1% in children aged under 15 years in RCT between 2011 and 2021.

Due to the increasing aging population of Wales the Office of National Statistics projects a rising death rate until 2048/49, from 36,000 per annum to 39,000 per annum, nationally.

There is also a trend towards less expensive and more environmentally sustainable memorials.

Due to changes in the ethnicity and religious profiles of the population of RCT, there is an increased demand for Muslim funerals, humanist services, and direct cremations.

Percentage of usual residents by age group, **Rhondda Cynon Taf**



Source: Office for National Statistics – 2011 Census and Census 2021

Challenges and Opportunities:

Legislation

The service is required to comply with all future changes in legislation including changes to minimum environmental standards, operational responsibilities, and equality, diversity and inclusion requirements. This includes the reduction of mercury

and nitrogen oxides, the introduction of local Medical Examiners, and compliance with the National Framework for the delivery of Bereavement Care, October 2021.

The needs of bereaved people with protected characteristics, as outlined in the Equality Act 2010, of the Public Sector Equality Duty (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation) are recognised and reasonable equality of access to appropriate services must be provided.

Ground Management

The current projected capacity for each cemetery for full earthen burials is:

| Cemetery | Projected lifespan – full earthen burials |
|---------------------|--|
| Treorchy | 5 years |
| Penrhys | 20 years |
| Trealaw | 30 + years |
| Ferndale | 70 years |
| Glyntaff | 7 years |
| Cefn Y Parc | 52 years |
| Ty Rhiw, Taffs Well | 100 + years |
| Llanharan | 59 + years |
| Brynygaer | 150 + years |
| Aberdare | 150+ year |
| Aberffwd | Nil - closed |
| Maesyarian | 25 years |
| Abercynon | Nil |
| Ynysybwl | 5 years |

As a result, some of our cemeteries will not have new graves available within the next ten years. This highlights the need to develop a land management plan that also incorporates proposed new legislation around the re-use of grave space and reviews the length of Exclusive Right of Burial within RCT. The Law Commission proposal is for a 75-year Exclusive Right of Burial. The Commission currently estimate the available land for new burials will be exhausted in Wales within 30 years.

Leases on a burial plot can range from 25 to up to 100 years, giving exclusive right of burial (EROB). However, longer EROBs can build pressure on the land available for burials. RCT currently offer EROB for 100 years. In RCT this will raise a pressure on existing land use at 3 cemeteries over the short to medium term and increase the land use pressure on a further 3 over the next 20 years. It is therefore apparent that the current approach to EROBs is not sustainable in the long term. It also restricts the ability to reclaim and recycle existing land in an environmentally sustainable manner. A review and consultation on the length of Exclusive Rights of Burial, the length of burial plots for cremated remains, and the future proofing of the land available for burials is required.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Whilst the service strives to be able to offer multi-faith burials, Muslim funerals are restricted to Aberdare cemetery with the provision of lining the grave. The request for Muslim faith burials is rising as the faith profile of residents is changing. The National Census of Wales 2021 reported that the second largest religious affiliation in Wales was Muslim, with 2.2% of the population identifying as Muslim in 2021. This is an increase from 1.5% in 2011.

The area at Glyntaff Cemetery for Jewish burials is almost at capacity. There has not been a request for an interment in this area within the last 5 years.

Cefn Y Parc Cemetery has an area set aside for Serbian interments and this has capacity for more than 50 years based on current usage.

Operating costs

Funeral Poverty

Sun Life's recent survey found that the funeral bill is one of the highest defaulted debts. The number of people who are without next of kin to make arrangement for funerals is also increasing, and in many cases, families are unable to meet funeral expenses. The Authority has a duty to make funeral arrangements where it is clear that none are being made, and the number of Public Health Funerals arranged as a result is increasing.

Public Health funerals arise when no provision has been made for the cost of the funeral or cremation within the Estate and/or relatives are unable or unwilling to meet the costs involved. A Bereavement Support payment is available to relatives claiming qualifying benefits, but it does not cover the full cost.

- 11 public health funerals arranged by RCT 2023 – spend £8,332.00
- Jan – April 2024: 8 further public health funerals
- Current economic climate and cost of living crisis will likely see increased demand in the foreseeable future
- Another increasing pressure arises when private cremation plans are not fully paid at time of death leading to a referral to the Council for a public health funeral
- There is an increasing risk of Health Boards declining to renew contracts for Hospital deaths and instead referring the deceased to the Local Authority as a public health funeral

| Number of Public Health funerals | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 | 2024 (Jan – Oct) 11 |
|----------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|---------------------------|
| | 3 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 14 | 5 | 7 | |

Opening Times

The opening hours and accessibility of cemeteries and burial grounds have remained consistent for many years, with opening and closing of the areas 7 days a week. A review is required to assess the balance between ensuring appropriate accessibility and the logistical financial cost, to ensure future sustainability of access services.

Workforce

The service area has an ageing workforce with vacancies attracting fewer applications for vacant positions due largely to the type of work and perceived low rate of pay for the skills required. Historically grave diggers were manual labourers with on-the-job-training provided by peers. Changes in safety legislation and work methods now require cemetery operatives to hold professionally recognised qualifications for grave excavation and licences to operate and transport plant and equipment. Safety considerations have also shaped the way the task is performed requiring professional training in installing shoring to excavations (COTS) and training is provided by external bodies such as ICCM (Institute of Cemetery & Crematorium Management) or FBCA (Federation of Burial and Cremation Administration) both of which have umbrella standards, inspections, and membership.

Memorials

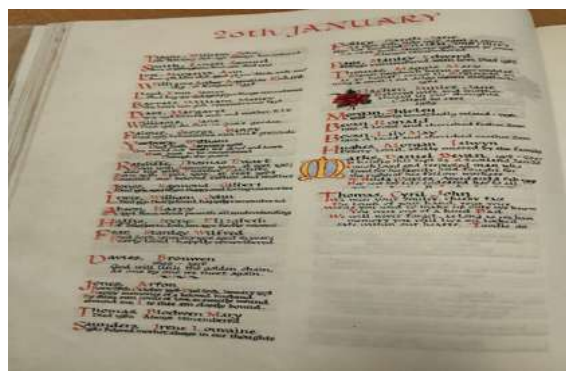
RCTCBC currently provide a range of memorials including tablets and plaques of various sizes, rose bushes and benches. However, the range and cost of the memorials available are limited and there is increasing demand for lower priced memorial options due to funeral poverty and greater choice in an increasingly secular society. This would require creating new memorial areas and dedicated baby memorial gardens, consulting on potential additional lower cost memorial options, and redesigning the Book of Remembrance cabinet and room to ensure that it is fully accessible.

It is also important to ensure that the memorial service is both environmentally and financially sustainable for the future. There are a number of older, more traditional memorial areas which require a high level of maintenance and upkeep, especially grass cutting. A review and public consultation could be undertaken to establish more environmentally friendly approaches such as wildflower areas, lower maintenance areas, natural alternatives such as wood and slate memorials, and service packages for customers who request additional upkeep of their plot.

Some authorities offer a maintenance scheme where the grave is tended for a set number of occasions through the year and an opportunity to arrange for floral tributes to be placed for an additional fee. A photograph is routinely sent to family to view works carried out or tributes laid.

Rose bush memorial areas are also provided, however the costs to maintain these areas is far in excess of the cost of a 10 year rose memorial plot. The soil in these areas is very poor, but because there are cremated remains interred under the roses, the soil cannot be disturbed. As a result, the roses rarely survive for longer than a year

and have to be continually replaced at a significant cost. Consultation and review is required to establish more environmentally and financially sustainable alternatives.



Letters to Heaven

In 2023 Glyntaff and Llwydcoed crematoria installed white post boxes inviting messages, cards and letters to loved ones. This initiative is especially aimed at younger family members and helps in opening conversations around grief and loss. This initiative has proved popular and well used. Messages are removed unopened and composted. Currently around 1000 letters per quarter are posted at Glyntaff and Llwydcoed.

Cremations

Direct cremations are a simpler funeral option that do not include a service and therefore can be undertaken at times that are most efficient for the service. Whilst still a small percentage of the total annual cremations at 3.12% in 2022, there is a growing demand and increasing competition from the private sector. Currently, the service is unable to fully respond to the opportunities in this market and the economic efficiencies it can provide through scheduling. This is due to the lack of refrigerated hold over equipment and a non-competitive price point, for a service that is not location specific.

With investment in the necessary refrigerated equipment within the service it would be possible to maximise the efficiency of the cremators, generate additional income, and competitively compete with the private sector in this market. It would further support

local business through direct cremation services provided by local independent funeral directors at similar costs to national private sector companies. Additional benefits would also include addressing some of the environmental impact measurements for the Federation of Burial and Cremation Authorities inspections.

A recent survey carried out with funeral directors who frequently use our facilities demonstrated that cost was the main factor in choosing alternate venues for direct cremation and that more services of this type could be accommodated should costs be adjusted.

In relation to fees charged for all Bereavement Services RCT generally compares favourably with neighbouring local authorities and private crematorium contractors. The exception to this, is direct cremations where all local authorities are more costly than private cremation companies. This Strategy will aim to address the balance. A comprehensive local price evaluation is completed annually and feeds into the fee setting process.

Digital Services

Both Glyntaff and Llwydcoed crematoriums have access to digital versions of Books of Remembrance with a link provided to families to view the entry at any time online.

This type of “Virtual visit” is becoming more popular with families wishing to view photographs of memorials online when visiting is not possible or practical.

Slideshows, live streaming, on-demand, and keepsake tributes are available for every cremation service at either facility. Digital media services are provided by Obitus and families and funeral directors order services direct with the provider which is then downloaded to the crematorium ready for display/play at the service. There is a wide range of keepsakes which can additionally be purchased- DVD/CD/USB, photo books, memory box. Additional fees are payable for these services.

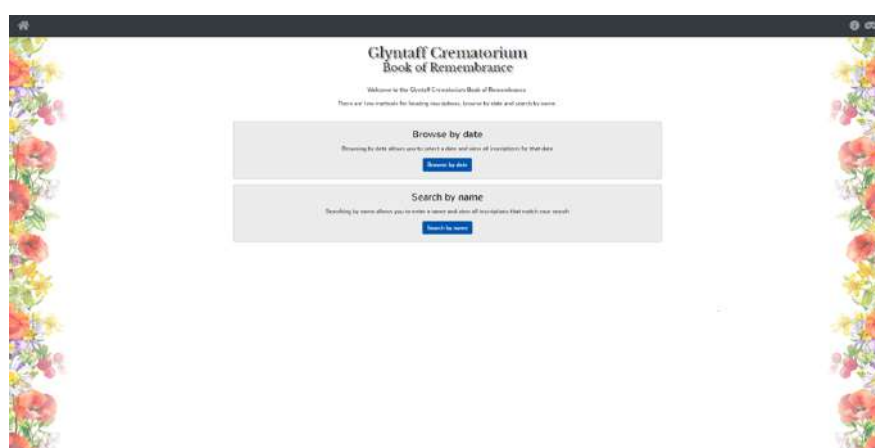


Image of Glyntaff Book of Remembrance digital link/search page

Heritage Services

Bereavement Services are currently contracting a specialist digitising company, Scripti, to scan and upload burial records for all 14 cemeteries in the borough, together with a mapping programme. It is anticipated that on completion the service will be able to provide a comprehensive “family history” package for a fee which will include photographs of any memorial, copies of internment notices, and burial register information. The completion of the project will also enable our staff to locate graves on site and transfer updated information directly to our records. This will also form the platform for Memorial safety inspections with information streamlined into a single process, reducing duplication of tasks and limiting the creation of paper records.

Online tracing sites such as Ancestry currently offer family history searches for a fee. Once the search has been made families often wish to gain more information about the resting places of loved ones and it is anticipated that the digitisation of RCT’s records will encourage more enquiry and provide a comprehensive response to family history requests, providing more specific information and digital documents to enhance the information provided by other search sites.

SECTION 3: The Strategy.

The Vision

Our Bereavement Service aims to provide the bereaved with a caring and compassionate service that is considerate to the current and future needs and expectations of a wide and diverse community. We will provide services and facilities of the highest quality, where the bereaved are treated respectfully through a sustainable service provision.

Supporting the Rhondda Cynon Taf Corporate Plan:

The Rhondda Cynon Taf Council's Corporate Plan 2024-2030 "Working with our Communities" sets out 4 priority areas. [The Council's Corporate Plan | Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council \(rctcbc.gov.uk\)](https://www.rctcbc.gov.uk)

| RCT Corporate strategic aims. | Corporate priorities supported by Bereavement Services | Bereavement Services |
|--|--|--|
| People and Communities: Supporting and empowering RCT residents and communities to live safe, healthy, and fulfilling lives. | Enabling people to lead and engage in strong, resilient communities. Bereavement Services are committed to the Armed Forces Covenant, providing discounted services for those serving, volunteering and veterans | Enabling all communities to develop resilience during times of sadness and celebrate the lives of departed family and community members. |
| Work & Business: Helping to strengthen and grow RCT's economy. | Supporting people of all ages to gain the skills they need for jobs in our local communities. Leading by example by providing experience, work, and training opportunities within the Council. Enabling businesses to take advantage of new opportunities and emerging markets. Developing high quality public spaces that help improve health, wellbeing and nature e.g. tree planting and green spaces. | Engaging in the RCT apprenticeship scheme. Employee training and development programme Working with local Funeral Directors to develop further a local Direct Cremation service, through the installation of hold over facilities Developing a long-term land management plan for cemeteries to ensure sustainable capacity and environmental quality |

| | | |
|--|---|--|
| <p>Nature & Environment: A green and clean RCT that improves and protects RCT's environment and nature.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protecting, supporting and working with nature to tackle both the Climate and Nature emergencies. • Protecting our existing trees and expanding woodland through natural regeneration and urban tree planting. • Managing public sector land to support sustainable projects including increasing biodiversity. • Providing a range of quality green spaces for people and communities to enjoy. | <p>Developing a grounds maintenance approach to cemeteries that enhances operational sustainability and promotes nature, including natural regeneration, biodiversity and tree planting and providing information to visitors</p> <p>Protecting the rare species of flora and fungi present in some of our cemeteries. Developing plans to preserve these areas for future generations and sensitively manage our public areas</p> <p>Review opening hours and access arrangements to cemeteries</p> |
| <p>Culture, Heritage & Welsh Language. Recognising and celebrating RCT's past, present and future.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protecting and promoting the history of RCT for future generations through education, conservation and commemoration: Identifying, recording and sharing the history of RCT. • Recognising and improving our awareness of diversity in our communities. • Continuing to grow the use of the Welsh language. | <p>Developing a medium-term maintenance plan for the chapels and memorials</p> <p>Continue to develop the accessibility of digital records</p> <p>Ensure communities, of all faiths can benefit from the services they need.</p> <p>Continue to provide and promote services through the Welsh language</p> |

RCT Bereavement Services: 6 Key Strategic Objectives:

| | |
|---|---|
| Objective 1: Dignity | To be at all times respectful and caring to the needs of the bereaved community. To ensure that our approach is empathetic to the needs of bereaved families and that the services are provided in a thoughtful and sympathetic way. |
| Objective 2: Equality and Inclusion | To be a considerate and inclusive service, that is open, honest and that engages fully with the bereaved and stakeholders in order to understand the needs and expectations for all service provision. |
| Objective 3: Quality | To be seen as market leaders in respect of service provision and standards by adoption of best service practices and to demonstrate continual improvement. Where new ways of working and alternative service opportunities are sought and embraced. |
| Objective 4: Sustainability | To ensure the efficient and effective use of all equipment, facilities and financial resources in order to deliver optimum value for money services. |
| Objective 5: Safety & Environmental Sustainability | <p>To ensure that all service provision complies fully with legislative requirements and is compliant with industry standards and Codes of Practice.</p> <p>To ensure that the service is operated and facilities managed in ways that support the Council's Statutory responsibilities and environmental policies and minimise the impact the service may have on the local and wider environment.</p> |
| Objective 6: Protecting the Heritage & History of our community | <p>Celebrating links with Dr William Price and resultant Cremation Act, Glyntaff Crematorium was the 1st to be built in Wales and the 14th in the UK, a status recognised by the Cremation Society with a commemorative tree planting in 2024 to celebrate the centenary.</p> <p>Ensuring our rich industrial heritage is preserved for future generations with information about local notable businesses and mining disasters commemorated within our cemeteries</p> <p>Providing a comprehensive range of information through digital documents, family history searches and recording and protecting our memorials for future generations</p> |

SECTION 4: The Way Forward.

The First 5 Year Action Plan

| YEAR | Objective | ACTIVITY |
|--------|--|---|
| 2024/5 | 4: Sustainability 4: Sustainability 3: Quality 5: Safety and Environmental Sustainability 2,3 and 5: Equality and Inclusion, Quality, and Safety | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• In partnership with the Finance Department, review existing fees and charges, with reference to those charged by other Local Authorities.• Apply to the Invest to Save Fund for refrigerated “hold over” equipment.• Produce an information document regarding the leases for cremated remains and seek a decision to create consistency in the application of these leases.• Seek the capital investment required to achieve the legislative requirements for NOX abatement.• Identify and implement annual staff training and development (through the Councils’ Individual Performance Review Scheme) including requirements to sustain health and safety standards, Welsh Language requirements, and EDI awareness. |
| 2025/6 | 6: Heritage and History 4: Sustainability 3 and 4: Quality and Sustainability 1 and 3: Dignity and Quality | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Introduce new family history service, providing suite of documents to supplement grave information (through completion of digitisation scheme commenced 2022)• Review the service offer and charges for direct cremations, leases, length of service, type of burial, memorials, and digital services with a view to ensuring consistency, sustainability, and increased income generation.• Maximise opportunities through the RCT Apprenticeship Scheme to achieve apprenticeships in the bereavement professions.• Review, with consultation, all customer facing services and marketing (both direct and through funeral directors) and identify a plan of improvement and development. |

| | | |
|--------|--|--|
| 2026/7 | <p>4: Sustainability</p> <p>3: Quality</p> <p>3,4 and 5: Sustainability and Environmental Sustainability</p> <p>3: Quality</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement any agreed service changes from the review in 25/26. • Implementation of improvements in customer facing services, information and marketing, as required. • Develop a forward plan to ensure that land is available for burial provision taking into consideration the outcome of the Law Commission review and changes to legislation in regard to grave re-use. Prepare and develop existing land adjacent Penrhys Cemetery as a medium-term approach to burial provision, land maintenance and development, addressing business continuity, environmental sustainability, and the financial efficiency of access and maintenance. • Introduce an online booking system for cremations |
| 2027/8 | <p>Against all objectives</p> <p>6: Heritage and History</p> <p>4 and 5: Sustainability, Safety and Environmental Sustainability</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the service developments undertaken in the previous 3 years and identify any further developments or improvements required. • Expand on family history services to include memorial information and drone pictures of memorials and locations. • Produce a 5-year forecast of capital maintenance requirements to buildings and equipment, for consideration. |
| 2028/9 | <p>Against all objectives and performance indicators</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review service achievements in the Strategy and Action Plan and produce a 5-year Action Plan for 29/30 – 33/34, taking into consideration the changing external and operating environment. |

SECTION 5: Benchmark Performance

Service Performance Indicators

The service will develop a framework of local performance indicators that will demonstrate the performance of the service over time and the impact of delivering the 5-year action plan.

Performance Analysis

The service will continue to be evaluated against the annual benchmark data produced nationally, to ensure operating and service comparability.

Annual Performance figures for Wales published by Cremation Society

2023/4

| Facility | Cremation numbers 1 Jan – 31Dec 2022 | Cremation numbers 1 Jan 2023 – 31 Dec 2023 | Total since opening | January 2023 basic cremation fee (£) | January 2024 basic cremation fee |
|--------------------------------|--|--|------------------------|--|--|
| Aberdare | 1,265 | 1,270 | 61,524 | 739.00 | 813.00 |
| Aberystwyth | 914 | 889 | 16,986 | 950.00 | 1,010.00 |
| Bangor | 1,252 | 1,270 | 47,446 | 772.00 | 830.00 |
| Barry (Cardiff & Glamorgan) | 1,396 | 1,364 | 13,922 | 930.00 | 1,030.00 |
| Blackwood (Sirhowy) | 1,632 | 1,831 | 4,536 | 950.00 | 1,010.00 |
| Bridgend | 1,569 | 1,183 | 69,431 | 745.70 | 824.00 |
| Cardiff | 2,621 | 2,662 | 177,687 | 780.00 | 820.00 |
| Colwyn Bay | 992 | 985 | 107,273 | 773.00 | 850.00 |
| Gwent | 1,587 | 1,440 | 150,154 | 828.00 | 845.00 |
| Llanelli | 1,975 | 2,257 | 27,300 | 950.00 | 1,010.00 |
| Margam | 1,543 | 1,671 | 73,876 | 817.00 | 835.00 |
| Narberth | 1,639 | 1,555 | 64,894 | 749.00 | 806.00 |
| Newport | 1,136 | 1,439 | 7,348 | 950.00 | 1,010.00 |
| Morthop | 1,577 | 1,356 | 6,778 | 995.00 | 1,020.00 |
| Pontypridd | 1,043 | 1,156 | 124,566 | 739.00 | 813.00 |
| St Asaph | 1,310 | 1,302 | 9,226 | 915.00 | 975.00 |
| Swansea | 1,805 | 1,826 | 155,388 | 765.00 | 805.00 |
| Wrexham | 1,440 | 1,662 | 78,265 | 750.00 | 825.00 |

Cremation Society Aug 2024 published statistics issue (Pharos, volume 90)

There are currently 334 crematoria in the UK, 12 of which are new build facilities.

| 2024 | Percentage of crematoria Nationally | Glyntaff & Llwydcoed crematoria |
|--|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Crematoria with webcams/digital services | 97.24% | yes |
| Crematoria recycling metals | 96.32% | yes |
| Crematoria with EV charging points | 14.72% | yes |
| Crematoria with Nox abatement fitted | 21.47% | no |
| Crematoria using recycled heat from cremators onsite | 86.23% | yes |
| Crematoria with cold storage | 42.33% | no |
| Crematoria holding over bodies | 81.60% | no |
| Crematoria with online booking facility | 60.12% | no |
| Crematoria charging cancellation fee | 23.01% | no |
| Crematoria charging for late arrival or overrun services | 34.36% | No |

Inspections and Consultation

All member crematoria in the UK are subject to three yearly inspections by the Federation of Burial and Cremation Authorities who measure performance, staff, buildings and practices against specific criteria which are consistent throughout. There is currently discussion around the Competition and Marketing Authority introducing regulatory inspection which is likely to follow similar criteria – this is as part of a continued review into the funeral sector including funeral directors.

RCT Bereavement Services received a score of 93% at Glyntaff and 97% at Llwydcoed in the three yearly inspections by FBCA carried out early 2024– much of the lost scoring being due to environmental issues which are currently being addressed and the proposals around holding over and direct cremations contained within this strategy.

In context, Glyntaff was the first crematorium to open in Wales in 1924 with the buildings adapted from Cemetery chapels. The FBCA measures all crematoria against the same criteria, demonstrating that RCT Bereavement Services is continuing to compete in the sector and making changes and improvements to ensure a continuously improving environment for service users. These inspections will be used to identify further developments required and the service will aim to maintain a score at 95% or above.

The Federation complimented the efficiency and professionalism of staff and rated the administrative procedures as some of the best in the UK, requesting some of our non-statutory forms to be used by the Federation as examples of best practice.

A number of staff have undergone professional bereavement counselling training through CRUSE bereavement care and undergo training and further development through ICCM for development and to ensure information is current. Staff are able to assist with family-centred funerals where a funeral director is not required and to offer advice and assistance in many areas associated with funeral provision.

SECTION 6: Conclusion

This is the first formal strategy for RCT Bereavement Services. It provides a clear vision for the service, the Council, stakeholders, staff, and the public. It also demonstrates that the strategic objectives of the service contribute to the wider corporate strategic aims.

This strategy provides a medium-term focus for the service to ensure that it can develop and evolve to meet the changing social, legislative, and environmental environment. It demonstrates that a pro-active approach to the investment and management of the service is required over the medium term, in order to maintain the high quality of service and continue to meet evolving customers and stakeholder expectations.

It also identifies operational practices that have been inherited over time and which would benefit from public consultation and review to ensure that they provide the efficiency and effectiveness required in the future.

This strategy encapsulates the focus, intent, and accountability required to ensure that the service can continue to appropriately meet the end-of-life needs of the population, with efficient, effective, and high-quality services that are inclusive, respectful, and dignified.