

<b>BRIEFING</b>	<b>TO:</b>	Gold
	<b>DATE:</b>	8 December, 2020
	<b>LEAD OFFICER</b>	<p>Zoe Oxley Head of Operations &amp; Business Transformation Culture Sport and Tourism Regeneration and Environment Services Tel: 07585795975</p> <p>Ashleigh Wilford Superintendent Registrar &amp; Bereavement Services Manager Culture Sport and Tourism Regeneration and Environment Services Tel: 07795542990</p>
	<b>TITLE:</b>	Proposal to reduce service times at East Herringthorpe Crematorium Chapel in order to increase capacity

## 1. Background

<b>1.1</b>	This briefing paper details the current position in relation to the number of available funeral services at the crematorium chapel at East Herringthorpe. It also proposes to increase availability by reducing the time allotted in chapel in order to create additional services to meet rising demand.
<b>1.2</b>	With an increase in confirmed Covid-19 cases in Rotherham, increasing hospital admissions and increasing excess deaths it is proposed that preparations are made to cope effectively with the inevitable increased demand at the crematorium.
<b>1.3</b>	<p>There are usually 55 available slots per week available at the crematorium. Daily these consist of two 5-minute direct cremations, one 30-minute intimate service (no minister) and ten 45-minute services. From Monday 16<sup>th</sup> November these were increase to a total of 82. This was achieved by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Adding 2 additional 5-minute, direct cremations per day, Monday-Friday.</li> <li>- Adding 3 additional 45-minute evening slots per day, Monday-Friday.</li> <li>- Adding Saturdays for services. This includes one 30-minute intimate service and 11 45-minute services throughout the day.</li> </ul>
<b>1.4</b>	In order to address the increasing number of deceased within the pathway it is recommended that additional services are created.
<b>1.5</b>	<p>A further increase in the number of available funeral services at the crematorium chapel will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allow the crematorium to cope with the increase in demand due to an increase in excess deaths.</li> <li>• Support the South Yorkshire Local Resilience Forum to offer increased cremation services in line with the agreed trigger points.</li> </ul> <p>• Maintain momentum with the booking of funeral services, which is vital to help to</p>

	<p>reduce the potential for delay in the system.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduce the average number of days from death to funeral for the deceased which will assist with any cold storage issues at the mortuary and Funeral Directors premises.</li> <li>• Retain availability of a quality funeral service even at a reduced service time for members of the public during high demand periods.</li> <li>• Continue to build on positive relationships between the Council, the Crematorium, Funeral Directors and local Faith Leaders.</li> <li>• Reduce the cost to the family.</li> </ul>
<b>1.6</b>	<p>Based on the review of options and consultation undertaken, as set out in this report, the recommendations are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In line with regulations, the number of attendees at a funeral service will remain at a maximum of 30, continuing to observe 2 metre distancing for family bubbles within the chapel.</li> <li>• Service times for cremations will be reduced from 45 minutes to 30 minutes to further increase availability in line with the current back log and predicted increase in the death rate.</li> <li>• The price for a service will be reduced from £943 to £775 to reflect the reduced time in chapel.</li> <li>• That the service streaming fee is included in the £775 price. This will allow management of funeral attendee numbers and enable bereaved families and friends to view the service.</li> <li>• Changes to take effect from 4<sup>th</sup> January 2021.</li> <li>• Monitoring is introduced in line with key triggers detailed within this report.</li> </ul>
<b>1.7</b>	<p>Numbers are currently still restricted to a maximum of 30 attendees at a funeral service, including household members, close family members or friends. This was confirmed in the new national restrictions published on the 26<sup>th</sup> of November.</p>

## 2. Key Issues

<b>2.1</b>	<p><b>Weekly Death Rates</b></p> <p>For October to December the average number of deaths usually registered in Rotherham over one week is 50, this is based on an average over the last 4 years. The death rate has been running with a 50% increase throughout November and at the week ending 6<sup>th</sup> of December this increased to 90% (95 registered deaths).</p>
<b>2.2</b>	<p>During the week commencing the 20<sup>th</sup> of April recorded deaths peaked at 133 (compared to 44 for the same week in 2019). This rate increased rapidly with the 30-minute services not being introduced quickly enough to manage this effectively which resulted in a knock-on effect into the weeks following.</p>
<b>2.3</b>	<p>There have been many different suggested predictions of the impact of covid over the winter. However, there are many unknowns which would have a significant effect on the predictions: such as the nature of future restrictions, the adherence and impact of these on reducing transmission, the impact of co-infection of other common winter diseases, such as influenza, and any improvements to management and treatment of covid infection. Therefore, a pragmatic description has been given below which shows what we would expect was the current high infection rate to result in a similar pattern of mortality as seen in the first wave in April. It is difficult to compare infection rates and impact of disease from April due to the difference in testing protocol and hospital usage. However, assuming an approximation similar to April seems appropriate given we have</p>

already seen double the hospital admissions but are aware people are accessing hospital care earlier in their infection. Significant caution should be made with interpretation of this prediction and it is only given to support planning processes should this scenario occur. Given the current increase in deaths and the burden on the hospital in terms of admissions, it seems vital that 30-minute services are introduced, unless drastic changes to expected excess deaths, infection rates and hospital admissions occur throughout the national restriction period.

**2.4** The data below is provided Public Health and details the projections until the end of December 2020.



**2.5** The trigger point at which 30-minute services should be activated is at a rate of 80 deaths per week. This is a 60% increase on the average weekly deaths for the period. At the week ending 6<sup>th</sup> December, 2020 this trigger was reached with a 90% increase in death rate. There is also an agreed 60% red trigger point for cremation availability overall across the South Yorkshire Local Resilience Forum, this was reached on 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2020.

**2.6** There are increased bodies in the pathway, this is up from 107 in mid-August to 250 currently. In addition, the average turnaround time from death to cremation/burial is usually 17 days but this is now at c.28 days. Whilst there are still available slots for services at the crematorium, these are in the morning or later in the day and families tending to choose to wait longer for a more suitable time. During the first outbreak the service worked with the funeral directors to try and encourage them to use all available slots, but this was easier in that there were more daylight hours. The concern is that if the number of bodies in the pathway continues to escalate, it will put significant pressure on the mortuaries, particularly at the hospital where the majority of deaths are now occurring. (61% of Covid deaths were at the hospital up to the end of June, since then it is 81%).

**2.7** The overall deaths are currently at 90% above average and Public Health predict an elevated number of excess deaths will continue for at least 4 weeks.

**2.8** With approximately 80% of registered deaths going to cremation at East Herringthorpe Crematorium, this will give a figure of 100 bodies needing to be cremated at the peak week. The increase in excess deaths during the peak period will have a knock-on effect in bookings at the crematorium for weeks after, requiring maximum available services in order to cope with demand.

<p><b>2.9</b></p>	<p>The relevant trigger and threshold monitoring within the Managing the Deceased Workstream is as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of Covid patients in hospital is currently rated RED (Red = over 5 occupied beds). At 7<sup>th</sup> December, 2020 this was at 136 from 0 in early October.</li> <li>• Death rates are currently rated RED. (Red = 50% increase over the 4 year average) At 6<sup>th</sup> December, 2020 this had reached 90%.</li> <li>• Mortuary occupancy is currently rated RED (Red = over 50%) At 4<sup>th</sup> December, 2020 the occupancy was 53% (includes both Funeral Directors and hospital). N.B. there is no specific threat to capacity at the hospital, however the overall volume has created a backlog.</li> </ul> <p><b>Options Considered</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• With immediate effect request Dignity to move to 30-minute services.</li> <li>• Adding Sundays for services has also been considered but as these were not used when they were made available during the first wave of the pandemic, even though they were encouraged, it is felt that this option is not progressed at this time. Funeral Directors did feedback that they felt this wasn't used due to them requiring some down time. This option will be continually reviewed.</li> </ul> <p><b>Operational Considerations</b></p> <p><u>30-Minute Services with 30 Attendees in Chapel</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The 30-minute time slot in chapel would allow 20 minutes for the service to take place and 10 minutes for chapel staff to perform their duties in-between services.</li> <li>• In this 10 minutes, chapel staff are required to safely seat people, guide people out after the service, change the requested music for the following service, set up webcasting if requested, re position any moved chairs and sanitise everything in time for the next service to take place.</li> </ul> <p><b>Proposed actions</b></p> <p>It is proposed the move to 30-minute services is offered from 4<sup>th</sup> January, 2020.</p> <p>Dignity require at least two weeks' notice from the Council to alter their booking system to reflect the changes in time, however, there are already a significant number of services booked in prior to Christmas making it difficult to implement beforehand.</p> <p>Dignity will honour any bookings already made at 45 minutes at the current time and price but offer, where applicable, the option to decrease the time to 30 minutes at the lower price.</p> <p>Services being offered Monday to Saturday with 30-minute slots, will give a total of 20 available direct cremations and 117 attended cremations per week.</p> <p>Please note, if necessary, there is also the potential to include a further 17 30-minute slots by offering Sundays which would take the total to 20 available direct cremations and 134 attended cremations per week.</p> <p><u>Price</u></p> <p>With the proposed decrease in service time from 45 minutes to 30 minutes Dignity have confirmed that the price of the service would decrease to reflect this.</p>
<p><b>2.10</b></p>	<p><b>Options Considered</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• With immediate effect request Dignity to move to 30-minute services.</li> <li>• Adding Sundays for services has also been considered but as these were not used when they were made available during the first wave of the pandemic, even though they were encouraged, it is felt that this option is not progressed at this time. Funeral Directors did feedback that they felt this wasn't used due to them requiring some down time. This option will be continually reviewed.</li> </ul>
<p><b>2.11</b></p>	<p><b>Operational Considerations</b></p> <p><u>30-Minute Services with 30 Attendees in Chapel</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The 30-minute time slot in chapel would allow 20 minutes for the service to take place and 10 minutes for chapel staff to perform their duties in-between services.</li> <li>• In this 10 minutes, chapel staff are required to safely seat people, guide people out after the service, change the requested music for the following service, set up webcasting if requested, re position any moved chairs and sanitise everything in time for the next service to take place.</li> </ul>
<p><b>2.12</b></p>	<p><b>Proposed actions</b></p> <p>It is proposed the move to 30-minute services is offered from 4<sup>th</sup> January, 2020.</p> <p>Dignity require at least two weeks' notice from the Council to alter their booking system to reflect the changes in time, however, there are already a significant number of services booked in prior to Christmas making it difficult to implement beforehand.</p> <p>Dignity will honour any bookings already made at 45 minutes at the current time and price but offer, where applicable, the option to decrease the time to 30 minutes at the lower price.</p> <p>Services being offered Monday to Saturday with 30-minute slots, will give a total of 20 available direct cremations and 117 attended cremations per week.</p> <p>Please note, if necessary, there is also the potential to include a further 17 30-minute slots by offering Sundays which would take the total to 20 available direct cremations and 134 attended cremations per week.</p> <p><u>Price</u></p> <p>With the proposed decrease in service time from 45 minutes to 30 minutes Dignity have confirmed that the price of the service would decrease to reflect this.</p>

- The current price for a 45-minute service is £943. The price will reduce to the lower fee of £775 for a 30-minute service (includes the fee of £25 for webcasting the service via Wesley Media).

The decrease in price will have positive implications for those families who are currently experiencing financial hardship. Funeral Directors who often support struggling families with applications for a funeral grant to help towards costs, will be best placed to discuss this with the bereaved.

In line with monitoring and review plans, any subsequent return to 45-minute services will see an increase in prices back to the original fee of £943.

#### Burials

The proposed changes to funeral services at the crematorium will not affect the times and therefore the cost of burials available. Dignity will still be able to offer 5 burials per day which was enough to cope with demand during the first wave of Covid-19 but will be reviewed periodically.

To increase the amount of available cremation services in the chapel, burial services taking place within the chapel ceased from Monday 16<sup>th</sup> November. There is a low impact on burial services as many take place elsewhere, there is a low demand for these generally. However, if there is a specific requirement in order to meet disability or faith needs these will be considered.

#### **Consultation**

2.13

#### Funeral Directors

Funeral directors have the closest relationship with families and next-of-kin, and they support them through the process of caring for their deceased and guide them through any covid-19 restrictions and subsequent changes to service. Therefore, they are regularly consulted on such changes at Funeral Director Liaison Meetings.

The Rotherham Funeral Directors were consulted on the proposed changes to service times at the last Funeral Director Liaison Meeting that took place on the 9<sup>th</sup> of November. It was discussed and agreed that:

- The adding of additional available services and the subsequent decreasing in service time from 45 minutes to 30 minutes was welcomed.
- It would be vital that Funeral Directors and celebrants are able to complete the service in the allotted time, while still maintaining dignity for the deceased.
- As the number of hospital admissions and excess deaths increase it was thought increasing the amount of available services would ease any throughput issues.
- An increase in the number of available services will have a direct influence on the cold storage capacity both at the mortuary and at each Funeral Directors premises.

#### Faith and Community Leaders

Consultation has taken place with representatives from the various faiths across Rotherham throughout the pandemic, with the last meeting taking place on the 5<sup>th</sup> of November. Although these proposals were not discussed at this meeting, this approach was previously shared during the first wave without opposition. It is not anticipated that any issues will be presented this time around although the proposals within this briefing paper can be shared through established lines of communication for consideration and comment.

#### Neighbouring Authorities

	<p>For comparison our neighbouring authorities have already or plan to reduce service times to 30 minutes as listed below. It would be ideal to obtain some consistency in service times across the South Yorkshire sites for members of the public and to prevent the possibility of more funerals being requested at a site with longer service times available.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Doncaster MBC have moved to 30-minute services as of the 16<sup>th</sup> of November.</li> <li>• Barnsley MBC have moved to 30-minute services as of the 23<sup>rd</sup> of November.</li> <li>• Sheffield CC plan to move to 30-minute services as of the 30<sup>th</sup> of November.</li> </ul> <p><b>Public Health Position</b></p>
2.14	<p>Public Health would support the mitigation actions described, in light of the difficulties in predicting with any certainty the likely numbers of deaths over this period. The current infection rate seems to have slowed and begun to decrease, but it is likely demand in hospital will continue and potentially further increase for up to 2 weeks and deaths subsequent to that, even if the rate continues to fall.</p>
2.15	<p>There is significant uncertainty about how restrictions will change over the next couple of months as we go through the Christmas period. If restrictions are lifted, there is a significant risk of increased rates, which could cause another surge in hospitalisations and potential deaths early in the new year at a time when there are usually additional deaths due to winter effects. It would therefore assist preparedness if there were no capacity concerns, such as mortuary spaces, going into that period. Going into the new year with backlogs in the system could result in more exacerbated issue</p> <p><b>Legal Position</b></p>
2.16	<p>The proposals within this report are consistent with Government guidance in terms of numbers of people attending funerals. Further the proposed arrangements in relations to timings and costs can be accommodated within the contract with Dignity, the bereavement services provider.</p> <p><b>Financial Considerations</b></p>
2.17	<p>The proposals for fees are practical responses to Covid 19 and are reached in agreement with Dignity the Council's contracted Bereavement Services provider. Budgeted income for the service is £534,045, despite the responsive change in pricing forecast income will match budget</p> <p><b>Communication</b></p>
2.18	<p>Any changes to funeral services have proven to be highly sensitive in nature. Therefore, it is proposed that these changes and any further changes applied while reviewing the situation be communicated through the following channels:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• COVID-19 burial and cremation guides and the bereavement section of the Council's website will be updated to reflect the proposed changes and updates will go out to the public through the Councils usual communication channels.</li> <li>• Dignity will update their website and write to Funeral Directors to notify them when the changes will be implemented.</li> <li>• Funeral Directors are contacted weekly for their body storage figures by Bereavement Services and are consulted fortnightly at Funeral Director Liaison Meetings. Any changes can be discussed here and followed up by an email from Dignity and the Council.</li> </ul>

2.19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Meetings between local faith leaders and the Council have been taking place throughout the pandemic and channels of communication are available to disseminate any changes.</li> </ul> <p>It will be made clear in all communications that we are still in the middle of a pandemic, that these are temporary measures and will be kept under constant review.</p> <p><b>Monitoring and Review</b></p> <p>Bereavement Services will continue to work with Dignity, Funeral Directors and other workstream partners to monitor death rates, flow across the system and capacity levels.</p> <p><u>Proposed Triggers for a Review</u></p> <p>Key triggers will be established to monitor the impact of the proposed changes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>An increase in services by making Sundays available to cope with increased demand. This would be implemented when the take up of 30-minute service slots, Monday-Saturday reach 90% capacity. This would be removed when capacity falls back below 90%.</li> <li>A decrease in available services by returning service times to 45 minutes in line with reduced demand. This would be implemented when the number of bodies in the pathway falls below 200 for 3 consecutive weeks unless it is indicated in Public Health forecasting that an expected increase in deaths is imminent. An increase in service prices from £775 to £943 will occur to reflect longer service times.</li> <li>A further decrease in available services by removing evening and Saturday services in line with reduced demand when the total number of bodies in the pathway reduce to 150 for 3 consecutive weeks unless it is indicated in Public Health forecasting that an expected increase in deaths is imminent .</li> </ul> <p>Other key data to monitor will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Early indications from hospital admissions or Public Health England of significant local outbreak.</li> <li>Changes to government guidance and recommendation.</li> <li>Body storage capacity at the mortuary (excluding LRF temporary storage) and local Funeral Directors temperature-controlled storage.</li> <li>The average number of days from death to funeral.</li> </ul>
<b>3. Key Actions and Timelines</b>	
3.1	It is proposed that Dignity be notified of the decision to move to 30-minute service times with immediate effect. This will allow enough time for the new arrangements to be communicated with key partners and the public. It will also allow the two-week notification required for Dignity to make the required changes to their booking system.
3.2	The new arrangements will be monitored weekly with the option of Dignity being able to increase or decrease the number of services on offer in line with demand and triggers outlined at 2.8.
<b>4. Cabinet Member and Leader Comments</b>	
4.1	<p><b>Cabinet Member</b></p> <p>Given the large increase in excess deaths, the number of Covid patients and mortuary occupancy, it seems appropriate to move to 30 minute services. This is difficult decision given that the capacity at the crematorium has been reported at not more than 50%.</p>

	<p>I am disappointed at the lack of flexibility by Dignity in finding a solution which would allow reduced times at popular times, but still maintain some longer services.</p> <p>Finally, can I check how often the review will be reported, weekly to the Cabinet member would be preferable.</p>												
4.2	<p><b>Leader</b></p> <p>No further comments.</p>												
<b>5. Recommendations</b>													
5.1	<p>The following recommendations have been made considering the importance of family and friends being able to attend services to say goodbye to loved ones. The importance of such ceremonies, as part of the grieving process, is recognised and if the rules are followed dignity can still be maintained and risks managed while meeting increased demand for services.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Approve the number allowed to remain at 30 observing 2 metre distancing on the ground floor of the chapel.</li><li>• Approve the proposal to decrease the service times for cremations from 45 minutes to 30 minutes to take effect from 4<sup>th</sup> January, 2021.</li><li>• Approve the proposal to decrease the price per cremation service from £943 to £775.</li><li>• Approve the daily monitoring in line with key triggers detailed within this report.</li></ul>												
<b>6. Briefing consultation / sign off</b>													
6.1	<p>Has the above information been considered by:</p> <table><tr><td><b>Legal</b></td><td><b>Officer:</b> S. Fletcher</td><td><b>Date:</b> 12/11/20</td><td><b>Comments:</b> Legal implications are set out in the body of the report.</td></tr><tr><td><b>HR</b></td><td><b>Officer:</b> Kathryn Roberts, Senior HR Consultant</td><td><b>Date:</b> 12/11/20</td><td><b>Comments:</b> No staffing implications for RMBC staff</td></tr><tr><td><b>Finance</b></td><td><b>Officer:</b> Richard Young</td><td><b>Date:</b> 11/11/2020</td><td><b>Comments:</b> Financial implications are in the body of the report and are signed off by HOF</td></tr></table>	<b>Legal</b>	<b>Officer:</b> S. Fletcher	<b>Date:</b> 12/11/20	<b>Comments:</b> Legal implications are set out in the body of the report.	<b>HR</b>	<b>Officer:</b> Kathryn Roberts, Senior HR Consultant	<b>Date:</b> 12/11/20	<b>Comments:</b> No staffing implications for RMBC staff	<b>Finance</b>	<b>Officer:</b> Richard Young	<b>Date:</b> 11/11/2020	<b>Comments:</b> Financial implications are in the body of the report and are signed off by HOF
<b>Legal</b>	<b>Officer:</b> S. Fletcher	<b>Date:</b> 12/11/20	<b>Comments:</b> Legal implications are set out in the body of the report.										
<b>HR</b>	<b>Officer:</b> Kathryn Roberts, Senior HR Consultant	<b>Date:</b> 12/11/20	<b>Comments:</b> No staffing implications for RMBC staff										
<b>Finance</b>	<b>Officer:</b> Richard Young	<b>Date:</b> 11/11/2020	<b>Comments:</b> Financial implications are in the body of the report and are signed off by HOF										