

Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting

Improving Places Select Commission – 16 December 2025, 13:30.

Report Title

Dignity Funerals – Annual Report 2024-25

Report Author

Dignity Funerals Ltd
4 King Edwards Court
King Edwards Square
Sutton Coldfield
West Midlands B73 6AP

Kim Phillips, Business Leader, Rotherham Crematorium.

E-mail:- Kim.phillips@Dignityuk.co.uk

James Wintle, Operation Director, Crematoria

E-mail:- James.wintle@Dignityuk.co.uk

Clare Judic, Head of Region, Central

E-mail:- Clare.judic@Dignityuk.co.uk

Ward(s) Affected

Borough-wide

Report Summary

This report provides an performance update on the contractual agreement between Dignity Funerals Ltd and Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council (The Council) for 2024-25.

Recommendations

1. That members note the contents of the report
2. That members note the contents of the Annual Performance Report 2024-2025
3. That members note the 5 Year plan
4. That members note the Operational Plan

List of Appendices included

Appendix A	Annual Performance Report 2024-25 (Submitted 9 th April 2025)
Appendix B	5 Year Plan (Review 31 October 2025)
Appendix C	Operational Plan (Review 31 October 2025)

1. Background

On 1 August 2008, The Council entered into a 35 year contract agreement with Dignity Funerals Ltd.

- 1.1 This agreement in part, removes responsibility for capital works and maintenance of East Herringthorpe Crematorium and Cemetery, along with 8 other cemeteries located throughout the Borough to Dignity Funeral Ltd. The Council retain cemetery chapels, associated buildings and boundary walls in some cemetery sites.



2.1.2 That future annual reports the different types of funerals.

The crematorium and cemeteries managed by Dignity on behalf of the Council seek to accommodate the requirements of the whole Rotherham community and will work with families and funeral directors to try to ensure every last wish is fulfilled.

The crematorium has a chapel within the building which is generally used by families as part of the celebration of life service for the deceased, however there are variations on this process which the Dignity Team will accommodate when requested.

The types of services currently completed are detailed below:-

Type	Description	No undertaken April 2024 to March 25
Full Cremation	Chapel service with family/friends in attendance. Cremation takes place after the service when family left.	1711
Witnessed charge of cremation process	This is where family members are present at the point the deceased commences the cremation process. This is generally a faith-based requirement however it available to any family.	3
Committal only	Short service within chapel before or after church service	32
Direct cremation	Cremation with no chapel service*	128
Public health cremation	Paid by Public Health (Council) due to no family of deceased (or unidentified)	26
Hospital cremation	Paid by local hospital death in hospital and no family of deceased	0
Burials – full	Plot procured by family on 100 year lease	238

Type	Discription	No undertaken April 2024 to March 25
Faith related burial	Roman Catholic area – consecrated land	Included in full burials above
	Muslim – tomb/earthen option, service achieved within 24 hours	Tomb 27 Earthen 10
Interment of cremated remains	Variety of different sized plots for the burial of cremated remains 2, 4, 6 etc together.	109
Scattering of cremated remains	East Herringthorpe has 12 public scattering areas where ashes can be laid. Named after months of year.	All information recorded for family reference/enquiries

*All deceased are brought through the chapel and placed on the catafalque prior to cremation.

Pre-purchasing of burial and cremated remains plots is possible in areas where the total availability compares favourably to the currently annual usage rate.

2.2 Update on Annual Performance Report (APR) 1 April 2024 to 31st March 2025

The APR (included in pack) was submitted, in-line with contractual requirements on 9 April 2025. Below is an update on progress of the KPT which had not reached a green RAG rating at that point:

2.2.1 Performance review update April to November 2025

KPT	Priority	Planned Maintenance	RAG
2.1	High	Disruption to effective delivery of operation of facilities to be limited to the extent identified in the Annual Maintenance Plan.	
Comments/Updates on 2.1		Discussions have been on going with Bereavement Service, The Council Asset Management Team and Dignity regarding the requirements and Dignity are awaiting direction from The Council's Asset Management lead.	
2.2	Low	Carry out planned maintenance and asset renewal work in accordance with the Annual Maintenance Plan. Maintenance on going and monitored.	
Comments/Updates on 2.2		Inspections are undertaken weekly and action accordingly. Further discussions have taken place with The Council Asset Management Team regarding the requirement s and Dignity are awaiting direction from The Council Asset Management lead.	
KPT	Priority	Grounds Maintenance	RAG
4.2	Medium	All site road and footway surfaces to be maintained with a smooth, unencumbered surface.	
Comments/Updates on 4.2		Dignity (Property Services) have continued to consider capital expenditure issues during the contract negotiations and any Health and Safety issues have been addressed. Options have been considered to move the pathways at Moorgate, Masborough and Wath Cemetery forward to minimise environmental impact and enable an economic resolution.	
4.4	High	Provide for the removal of water run-off and sewage from the site by ensuring that all drains, sewers, gullies, and on-site treatment is maintained free from obstructions and unpleasant or unreasonable odours.	
Comments/Updates on 4.4		Drains are checked daily and are cleared of any obstruction or blockage. Annual CCTV drainage surveys take place to enable monitoring of pipework in all cemeteries. Some issues have been experienced with leaks from neighbouring areas at East Herringthorpe in 2025.	

KPT	Priority	Burial Services	RAG
9.1	Low	Provision of environmentally friendly burial options.	
Comments/Updates on 9.1		The Natural Burial area has been available for Burial from 1 st August 2025 at East Herringthorpe. Funeral Directors are aware of the provision and information packs have been distributed to ensure families have the details to consider this option. Wider awareness through local publications will take place in November 2025 to all households in Rotherham.	
KPT	Priority	Cemetery Management	RAG
15.4	Low	Provision of an effective plan for systematic testing of all cemetery memorials and progress in accordance with agreed timescales. Testing protocols and procedures to be in accordance with the Council's policy for the Management of Cemetery Memorials. Memorial testing completed.	
Comments/Updates on 15.4		An updated plan was sent to The Council on 23.01.2025. Additional discussion took place on 06.03.2025 and all questions raised by the Council have been answered.	
KPT	Priority	Planned Maintenance	RAG
17.2	Low	Carry out a review of policies annually or when a new policy is formulated. Consult Council on changes and update documentation accordingly.	
Comments/Updates on 17.2		An updated plan was sent to The Council on 31 October 2025	

2.2.2 Service Improvement (SI) Proposals

SI 1 Wath and Herringthorpe Expansion Plan

In line with the plan provided to the Council by Dignity on 9th September 2024 regarding the capital position, progress has been made, although contract discussions continue. Dignity have invested in the initial stage of the extension to the Muslim area at East Herringthorpe which will be completed at the end of November 2025.

This investment has increased the capacity within this section by 132 lined and 20 earthen graves. This will enable a level of pre-purchase of graves, this is a constant request from the community.

The next phase is in the planning stage and will ultimately offer over 600 further grave space for this area of the community. This is detailed further in the 5 year plan (Appendix B refers).

Wath Cemetery extension is progressing and is highlighted in section 2 of this report and also in detail in the 5 year plan (Appendix B refers). This project plan is timetabled for completion by mid year 2026 and will provide over 500 additional plots and allow pre-purchase, which has been requested by the community.

SI 2 Provision of Maltby Expansion Plan

The contract details the responsibility of land provision for expansion is The Council. Work will then progress to develop the land for burial purposes.

SI 3 Provide an on site Florist/Refreshment facility at East Herringthorpe

Dignity have provided a plan on 9th September 2024 which included investment for ancillary buildings. Dignity have submitted an option appraisal to the Council to consider this building for community use through a partnership agreement. The Council have given further feedback on this submission.

SI 4 Demolish Old block at East Herringthorpe

Linked to SI 3

SI 5 Installation of Letters to Heaven Postboxes

This project is on going, the first post box was installed in March 2025 in East Herringthorpe Cemetery. The agreed process is to compost the letters and return to the earth within the burials grounds. The details of the process have been posted on Facebook

and available at the side of the post box for viewing.

A further post box was erected in mid-2025 at Greasborough Lane Cemetery.

Post boxes for the remaining cemeteries have been ordered but as Dignity want to ensure that only British Steel is used there has been a delay in arrival due to current shortages of raw materials.

The boxes will be erected in the order agreed with Bereavement Services when they arrive from the manufacturer.

As detailed above, any mail recieved in any of the post boxes will be treated and become compost which will then be returned to the earth to support the growth of flowers and plants around the cemetery.

SI 6 Environmental Impact Review

As part of the action plan of continuous improvement for the Green Flag Award, Dignity have proposed an environment review. This has commenced with the production of a Bio-diversity and Sustainability Policy which focuses on the aims and objectives of cemetery management in supporting the environment and wildlife. Whilst there is a focus on East Herringthorpe Cemetery, several of the iniatives will be rolled out to other cemetery sites where appropriate.

A focused on reduction in plastic to include flower wrappings and ballons will take place from January 2026 with a view to eradicating by 2027.

Dignity are mindful that artificial flowers are going to be a difficulty as some families used this method of tribute if they are unable to visit frequently.

SI 7 Visitor experience

Dignity want to ensure that every visitor to any site has the best possible experience at all times. Feedback from families and funeral directors has improved significantly over the last 12 months as constant enquiries have been made to users to understand what they would like to see.

Improvements to the cemetery canopy (decoration and maintenance) which leads to the chapel have been undertaken along with work in the vestry and bearers room.

A traffic light system has been installed to support funeral directors as they approach the chapel and a refresh of the flower rooms has been completed.

All of this work was completed following discussion with users and funeral directors on where to focus funds.

The entrance area to East Herringthorpe has been cleared and a garden with floral displays, insect house and a variety of different sensory experiences has been very popular this year with visitors and benches have been installed to create a quiet contemplation area for anyone who needs it.

The work with friends groups has centred on site discussions to identify improvements. Where there is the possibility of immediate action it has been taken, one example to address the distance from the car park at East Herringthorpe to the chapel, for some visitors this is a challenging walk. A bench has been placed half-way along to support this. Other suggestions are being considered and actioned where possible.

SI 8 Dementia Awareness

The age demographic of visitors, particularly to crematorium services has a greater percentage of older members of the community. This by association, then gives a higher percentage of visitors who have a level of dementia.

Work is on-going to improve the Dementia awareness, through training and continued link with Alzheimer's associations and Rotherham General Hospital dementia team.

A dementia nurse has completed an inspection and made recommendations, which are captured in an action plan and being progressed, subject to financial approval.

An immediate action is to identify a quiet room for any visitors to the crematorium who may need time away from a group gathering, an immediate option is the book of remembrance room which is adjacent to the chapel along with space in the vestry and overflow area subject to the size of the funeral party.

The work will continue to be rolled out to all sites to support the needs of all visitors.

SI 9 Entrance area improvements

A significant amount of work has been undertaken to improve this area which has resulted in a number of compliments regarding the visual appearance and also the impact on the community who use the space for quiet contemplation. The area will continue to be improved and additional facilities added to offer bereavement support.

3. Dignity Commitment to Contract Development

3.1 Capital expenditure consideration

Dignity provided The Council with a detailed investment plan in September 2024 as part of the contract discussions. This included improvement to the cemeteries and amenities on site, which is estimated to cost between £1.5-£2.0m and includes:-

- Replacement of Cremators
- Chapel refurbishment
- Muslim burial area expansion plan
- Wath expansion plan

Work has been undertaken on the Muslim Burial area to expand the availability of burial plots for this community. The initial work will be completed by the end of November 2025, with plan for architect design of the next phase which ultimately will offer over 600 more plots in January 2026.

In addition work will commence in 2026 on the Wath Cemetery extension, ensuring the continued availability of burial space in one of the areas of the Rotherham Community which favours burials over cremations.

Future expenditure plans includes replacement of the cremators and refurbishment of the chapel for 2026/27.

3.2 Green Flag Award

Dignity and Glendale have worked in partnership to successfully achieve the standard of management and maintenance of East Herringthorpe Cemetery to be awarded the Green Flag accolade.

The management plan is in place to ensure continuous development and improvement to retain this award in the future for East Herringthorpe

Work with the Sheffield and Rotherham Wildlife Trust will support future projects in the cemetery and complement the Dignity Biodiversity and Sustainability Policy, whilst also identifying further educational opportunities for engagement with Rotherham schools.

3.3 Weekend staffing and visitor engagement

Following a review of customer need, staff are available for appointments over the weekend period. The number of service requests for weekend periods is increasing and Dignity are working with the funeral directors to accommodate any families who have a weekend requirement.

Dignity know that staff are the main asset to ensure customer care and therefore each staff members' contract has been discussed to ensure continued health and well-being whilst maintaining the customer needs.

The feedback from this decision has been very positive, enabling discussions and guidance on all sites and weekend engagement with the friends of groups' activities.

3.3.1 Feedback cards

Dignity reported to the IPSC in 2024 the review of the customer feedback process. Previously QR codes were available in cemetery notice boards and static locations within the crematorium. Investment has taken place to produce site-specific feedback post cards.



Front



Back

These cards are available around all sites and are included in all correspondence to families who engage with the Dignity team at Rotherham for any reason. The outcome is reviewed monthly. To date all feedback and ratings are at the top level 5 star.

It should be noted that although the postcards are included in correspondence with families using services we do chase feedback where a recent bereavement has taken place as Dignity feel this is inappropriate and may cause upset to families at an already difficult time. The team do seek feedback on the service and staff performance when families collect ashes or during contact to discuss memorial requirements.

3.4 Social responsibility within the Community

The Dignity Team have continued to build on the work undertaken in mid-2024 to develop a plan of engagement with the community. The objective was to continuously improve the support to all areas of the Rotherham community in all aspects of bereavement and associated awareness with death.

3.4.1 Open Day

In April 2025 to assess the extent of progress along this support journey, the Dignity team arranged an open event which was themed 'Dispelling the myths' surrounding death. The open event was just 3 hours but estimates suggests over 150 visitors, all of whom gave positive feedback. The event offered:-

- The chance to undertake a 'back of house' crematorium tour
- Discuss burial records
- Speak to Funeral Directors (3 in attendance to give choice)
- See inside hearse and family vehicles
- See inside private ambulance (and explain use)
- Discuss charity involvement in bereavement
- Visit new Natural Burial Area
- Observe a prepared grave
- Discuss memorial options

Feedback has been collated and additional information will be included in the open day for 2026 and will coincide with Dying Matters Awareness Week to allow links with the NHS teams.

3.4.2 School Engagement and support to young people

On going activities have been undertaken with High Greave Primary and Dalton Trinity Croft Primary School. The aim of this engagement is to encourage young people to ask questions about death and not be afraid of a cemetery environment.

Dalton Trinity Croft Primary Garden Club have been regular attenders in East Herringthorpe Cemetery to support the renovation of the Baby Memorial area. The pupils have scattered wildflower seeds, planted snow drop bulbs and painted pebbles to frame the baby scattering area. The pupils took an active interest in the Green Flag application and celebrated with the site in the success. Pupils have also attended the D-Day and remembrance celebrations and spoken to Royal British Legion members in attendance to support school projects. The engagement will continue each year with new pupils.

High Greave Primary Pupils have attended several celebrations as part of school projects including Remembrance Day and performing at the Christmas Memorial Service at East Herringthorpe as part of the Citizenship work. Dignity and Glendale have undertaken clearance/grounds maintenance of several areas at High Greave school to enable growing of vegetables and education of pupils.

Dignity are also working with home schooled pupils to facilitate visits and understanding.

Dignity staff volunteer regularly at Rotherham secondary schools to support careers days, interview role play and business days to ensure the industry is explained and understood, giving an insight of an industry which young people may not consider as a career.

3.4.2 Care home support – Continuous Professional Development (CPD)

The Dignity team have been working with several care homes to facilitate visits to the crematorium and chapel as part of the CPD and understanding of carers. This work commenced following enquiries from the open day and has continued to support development of carers within Rotherham.

3.4.3 Memorial events

Dignity is committed to support the community on their bereavement journey. Events to help both the celebration of life and healing have taken place this year (detailed below) and will be repeated next year:-

- Mothers Day Memorial Service
- Open Day
- D Day Service
- Fathers Day Memorial Event
- V J Day Service
- Baby Loss Awareness Week
- Remembrance Day celebration
- Christmas Memorial Service
- Chapel Memorial/Reflection time on specific days through-out the year

3.5 Engagement with Funeral Directors

A scoping project commencing in 2024 with Funeral Directors to understand the existing strengths and areas for improvement with both the crematorium and cemetery service provision.

This engagement has continued with a number of projects implemented, examples being

- refurbishment of the canopy adjacent to the chapel entrance,
- instalation of a traffic light system on entrance to the crematorium,
- works to Wath and Maltby to improve the experience for families in cars
- change in communication methods for information,
- implementation of an on-line booking system for crematorium services,
- change to Obitus media within the crematorium from the previous system at the request of funeral directors at significant cost to Dignity.

These improvements support the Funeral Directors to support the bereaved families of Rotherham.

Regular discussions and visits to Rotherham Funeral Directors will ensure these improvements continue.

The work undertaken has been reflected in a recent survey (October 2025) which was sent to funeral directors regularly attending the Rotherham Crematorium and Cemeteries. The percentage scoring over 95% of returns stated very satisfied, with the same percentage figure stating the service was better than the competition. The free text option commended all the staff, both front of house and office based, for support of the funeral directors and families.

3.6 Memorial options for Rotherham families after cremation services

Following a cremation there is the option for families to purchase a private plot (or garden) as a lasting memory, offering a place to visit for contemplation similar to the traditional burial plot. These spaces allow the interment of ashes (differing numbers dependant on the family size), which enables families to places loved ones together for eternity.

Dignity have continued to invest in the range and appearance of the private gardens at East Herringthorpe. This ensures a variety of options for the community, particularly ensuring price range affordable options for all families.

The investment in early 2025 of three new towers for small plaques and private scatterings is a popular addition. Two towers are located in the area immediately to the left of the cemetery when entering the gates and one is in the newly renovated baby area. This gives an affordable option for families to have a lasting memorial for loved ones.

The larger gardens are situated in the area which overlooks valley park, these continue to be popular and plans for 2026 to develop further the rose garden will be shared when concluded.

Dignity's commitment to the Rotherham community continues to achieve excellent feedback from users and all visitors enagaging with services. This commitment to improvement through focused activity by the professional team at Rotherham is supported by experience of the wider Dignity family who are leaders in the field, having years of experience and sites across the country with 45 crematoria and over 600 funeral homes.