

Meeting of:	COYCHURCH CREMATORIUM JOINT COMMITTEE
Date of Meeting:	1 MARCH 2024
Report Title:	CREMATORIUM BUSINESS PLAN AND FEES
Report Owner / Corporate Director:	REPORT OF THE CLERK & TECHNICAL OFFICER COYCHURCH CREMATORIUM JOINT COMMITTEE
Responsible Officer:	JOANNA HAMILTON BEREAVEMENT SERVICES MANAGER & REGISTRAR
Policy Framework and Procedure Rules:	There is no impact on the policy framework and procedure rules.
Executive Summary:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Report provides the Joint Committee with the details of a Service Level Business Plan and the proposed fees and charges for 2024-25 • Appendix 1 provides the Service Level Business Plan. • Appendix 2 provides a comparison table of fees and charges.

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to approve the Crematorium Service Level Business Plan and Fees report for 2024-25.

2. Background

2.1 A Business Plan is presented annually to the Joint Committee for approval which includes service objectives and proposed maintenance and improvement projects to enhance and maintain the Crematorium grounds and buildings for the forthcoming period.

3. Current situation / proposal

- 3.1 The total number of cremations for the 2023 calendar year was 1,186, made up of 773 from Bridgend, 283 from Rhondda Cynon Taff and 87 from the Vale of Glamorgan, with 43 non-residents. An agreement with the Princess of Wales Hospital for the cremation of non-viable foetal remains (NVF) has resulted in an additional 6 communal cremations. A further 17 individual NVF cremations were arranged directly with families. Statistical records for the period from January to December 2022 and 2023 are included in the Business Plan for comparison.

- 3.2 The proposed Service Level Business Plan for 2024-25 is attached as **Appendix 1** which outlines the service objectives for the period.
- 3.3 The Crematorium's cremation charge was placed at 291 out of 322 cremation authorities in a national fee league table published in summer 2023 by the Cremation Society of Great Britain (where the highest cost is detailed first).
- 3.4 The table below indicates comparison on **current** (2023-24) cremation fees for adjoining crematoria:

Crematorium	Cremation Fee 2023-24
Vale of Glamorgan (Barry)	£1030.00+ (excl.£60 organ)
Langstone Vale (Newport)	£1010.00 (excl. organ)
Llanelli	£1010.00 (excl. organ)
Sirhowy Valley (Pontllanfraith)	£1010.00 (excl. organ)
Croesyceiliog (Gwent)	£845.00 (excl. organ)
Coychurch (Bridgend)	£824.00 (excl. organ)
Thornhill (Cardiff)	£820.00 (excl. organ)
Glyntaff (Pontypridd)	£813.00 (excl. organ)
Llwydcoed (Aberdare)	£813.00 (excl. organ)
Narberth	£806.00
Morrison (Swansea)	£805.00 (excl.£31 organ)
Margam	£635.00

- 3.5 Fees and charges are set in accordance with delegated powers and the requirements outlined in Bridgend County Borough Council's Fees and Charge's Policy. In general, the aim is for full cost recovery, with fees and charges increased by inflation based on Consumer Price Index (CPI) (in line with the most recent CPI figure published in December 2023, which is 4%), or in accordance with statutory or service requirements, except where a clear decision is taken not to do so.
- 3.6 Coychurch Crematorium achieves full cost recovery each year, plus additional income which is transferred to its reserve funds.
- 3.7 In recent years Coychurch Crematorium has increased its fees in accordance with CPI, while nearby crematoria have taken account of the cost of living crisis and reduced their percentage fee increases. Margam Crematorium applied a 0% fee increase for three consecutive financial years from April 2019 until April 2023, and increased by only 3% in 2023-24. The table below provides a comparison of fee increases since 2019 with the nearest local authority crematoria, Margam to the west and Thornhill to the east:

	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25 Proposed
Margam cremation fee £	617	617	617	617	635	654
% increase		(0%)	(0%)	(0%)	(3%)	(3%)
Coychurch cremation fee £	680.70	696.40	707.50	745.70	824	824

% increase		(2.3%)	(1.6%)	(5.4%)	(10.5%)	(0%)
Cardiff						
cremation fee £	640	700	740	780	820	
% increase		(9.3%)	(5.71%)	(5.4%)	(5.13%)	

- 3.8 Cremation numbers at Coychurch Crematorium decreased by 385 from 1,571 in the 2022 calendar year to 1,186 in 2023 due to the closure of the larger chapel, Crallo Chapel, and the continual use of the smaller chapel, Coity Chapel, while the Flower Court building extension works took place. With less income being generated as a result of the decreased funeral numbers, the fee increase of 10.5% assisted with meeting increases in energy costs and other inflationary increases. Cremation numbers have increased to more normal levels since the re-opening of Crallo Chapel in December 2023, and numbers are expected to maintain normal levels during 2024-25. The proposed budget for 2024-25 shows a projected accumulated reserve balance as at 31 March 2024 of £1.9 million. The 2024-25 proposed revenue budget shows an anticipated net surplus of £256,000 to be transferred to the reserve funds, increasing the net surplus to £2.141 million as at 31 March 2025.
- 3.9 It is proposed that fees and charges relating to Cremation fees and ancillary services charges are not increased from 1st April 2024. This will assist to balance out the 10.5% increase in fees and charges in 2023-24 and prevent the gap in fees with Margam Crematorium widening further. **Appendix 2** shows the proposed fees and charges for 2024-25 and the additional comparator for fee increases of 4%.
- 3.10 In recent years it has become apparent that the Wesley Media system is the preferred choice for the bereaved, who are opting to utilise the unrestricted selection of digital music for reflection during the funeral service and also make use of webcast, recording and visual tribute options. Hymns are not so frequently requested but when hymns are chosen, they are normally well-known hymns that are accommodated on the Wesley Media system, with most families preferring to sing along to Wesley Media hymn choices which include accompanying choirs.
- 3.11 Media systems have now digitalised and moved on considerably in quality. The organ music now provided by Wesley Media is utilised by most of the Crematoria in the United Kingdom (UK). In recognition of this, the Crematorium recently invested in new state-of-the-art audio-visual systems for both chapels and consequently pays maintenance, administration and performance charges to Wesley Media. The Crematorium provides the digital Wesley Media system free of charge for all music choices during a funeral service. The Wesley Media system is operated by the Crematorium's Chapel Attendant. Consequently, providing a full-time organist post has become unsustainable. Enabling funeral directors to engage freelance organists, which are much more readily available, provides a means of meeting the needs of those few families that still require this service. It also removes the risk and pressures on the service when accountable for continual organist provision, improving the resilience of the service for the bereaved. This is the standard operating procedure implemented by the majority of crematoria throughout the UK.

- 3.12 Coychurch Crematorium is a unique Grade 2* listed building with a large, extension pipe organ, designed and built by N P Mander of St Peter's Organ Works, London, which forms a part of the listed building status. Such a specialist instrument not only requires regular technical care and maintenance but also needs protecting from misuse. The organ in the second chapel is another highly valuable instrument. The application of a small charge of £50, applied for the use of the Crematorium's organs, covers the increased service and maintenance costs, insurance and liability charges, and protects the organs from misuse by ensuring that they are utilised by an accomplished organist. This fee is included in the Crematorium's List of Fees.
- 3.13 Coychurch Crematorium provides visual tributes as part of its digital services with Wesley Media. These requests must be finalised 48 hours in advance of the funeral service. Wesley Media charges an additional fee for any such requests made within 48 hours of a funeral service. This charge of £100.00 has been added to the Crematorium's List of Fees.

4. Equality implications (including Socio-economic Duty and Welsh Language)

- 4.1 The protected characteristics identified within the Equality Act, Socio-economic Duty, and the impact on the use of the Welsh Language have been considered in the preparation of this report. As a public body in Wales the Council must consider the impact of strategic decisions, such as the development or the review of policies, strategies, services, and functions. It is considered that there will be no significant or unacceptable equality impacts as a result of this report.

5. Well-being of Future Generations implications and connection to Corporate Well-being Objectives

- 5.1 The Act provides the basis for driving a different kind of public service in Wales, with five ways of working to guide how public services should work to deliver for people. The well-being objectives are designed to complement each other and are part of an integrated way of working to improve well-being for the people of Bridgend. The well-being goals identified in the Act were considered in the preparation of this report. It is considered that there will be no significant or unacceptable impacts upon the achievement of well-being goals/objectives as a result of this report.

6. Climate Change Implications

- 6.1 There are no Climate Change implications arising from this report.

7. Safeguarding and Corporate Parent Implications

- 7.1 There are no Safeguarding and Corporate Parent implications arising from this report.

8. Financial Implications

8.1 These are reflected in the report. All variations to expenditure and income, as outlined in the Service Level Business Plan 2024-25, have been incorporated into the Treasurer's Report and the Revenue Budget for 2024-25, and will be presented to the Joint Committee in a separate report.

9. Recommendations

9.1 The Joint Committee is recommended to approve the Service Level Business Plan 2024-25 (**Appendix 1**).

9.2 The Joint Committee is recommended to approve the content of the report, the fees and charges as set out in this report and in **Appendix 2**, with no increases to fees and charges for 2024-25.

Background documents: None