

North Yorkshire Council

Transition (LGR) Overview and Scrutiny Committee

11 March 2024

Bereavement Service

Report of the Assistant Director – Regulatory Services

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To provide the committee with an overview of the Bereavement Service, operating model and proposed future development.

2.0 SUMMARY

- 2.1 This report provides an overview of the Bereavement Service, its current operating parameters and responsibilities. It explains the capital programme over the next five years including a chapel extension at Skipton and cemetery expansion in Filey, Harrogate, Knaresborough, Pateley Bridge, Scarborough and Whitby. Finally, it details the capital plan for cremator replacement and an overview of plans to contribute to the Council's climate change programme.

3.0 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Bereavement Service operates across the whole Council geography, with c.25 staff based at four locality crematoria
- Skipton Crematorium – opened 1952
 - Stonefall Crematorium (Harrogate) – opened 1936
 - Maple Park Crematorium (Thirsk) – opened 2022
 - Woodlands Crematorium (Scarborough) – opened 1961

In addition, there are over 100 cemeteries and closed churchyards across the whole of North Yorkshire which are operated by or are the responsibility of the Council.

- 3.2 The Service is a frontline customer facing one, with daily liaison with bereaved families and mourners as well as professional services including funeral directors, medical professionals, ministers, celebrants, memorial masons, and diocesan officers. The service has regular operational links with the Coroner and Registrars in North Yorkshire and with neighbouring local authority registrars.
- 3.3 The primary purpose of the service is to provide dignified funerals and cremation or burial of the deceased for the people of North Yorkshire. The current level of demand is approximately 75% of all deaths within the unitary authority. Further services are provided through opportunities for memorialisation of the deceased at both open and closed cemeteries, purchasing of burial plots and genealogical searches.
- 3.4 Staff based at crematoria all have multi-faceted roles encompassing the full range of duties involved in funeral services, burials, cremation, and memorialisation. An appropriate level of working knowledge of key legislation is required to ensure that the management of the deceased is in line with statutory legislation and great care is needed in ensuring that burials in

graves and of cremated remains are carried out accurately. Staff operate at satellite cemeteries and churchyards throughout the unitary authority to carry out burials and memorialisation checks. Stonefall also operates a pet crematorium facility. The service operates year-round, with pressure points when the death rate increases, often in the winter months.

4.0 DETAILED PRESENTATION OF THE SUBSTANTIVE ISSUE

4.1. Crematoria – an overview

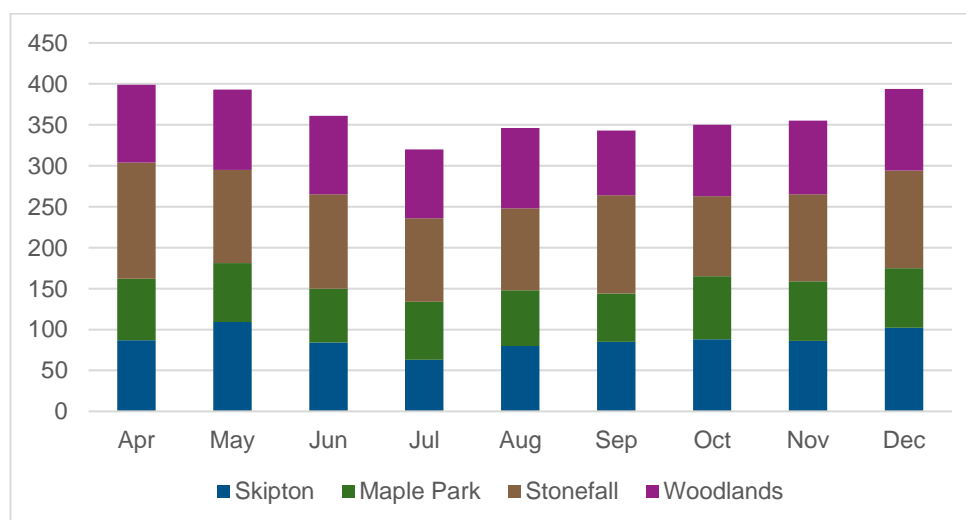
4.1.1. Skipton, Stonefall and Woodlands crematoria each operate two gas-fired cremators. Maple Park operates a single electric cremator. Second cremators are only used when required and careful planning of cremations is designed to minimise energy consumption.

4.1.2. Table 1 shows the number of cremations carried out since 1 April 2023. Table 2 (Section 4.2.3) shows the number of full burials or burial of cremated remains. The service has overseen the cremation or burial of 75% of all deaths registered in North Yorkshire between April and December 2023.

4.1.3. Table 1. Number of cremations 2023-2024

	Skipton	Maple Park	Stonefall	Woodlands
Apr	87	75	142	95
May	109	72	114	98
Jun	84	66	115	96
Jul	63	71	102	84
Aug	80	68	100	98
Sep	85	59	120	79
Oct	88	77	98	87
Nov	86	73	106	90
Dec	102	73	119	100
TOTAL	784	634	1016	827
	3261			

4.1.4. Overall cremations per month



- 4.1.5. Abatement plant is fitted to all cremators in line with Defra statutory guidance on reducing emissions, which includes CO₂ and mercury. There will be a requirement to upgrade aspects of this equipment within this administration once proposed amendments to emission limits are reduced.
- 4.1.6. Metals are recovered from the cremation process and are recycled with consent of bereaved families. Monies generated are distributed to locally operating bereavement charities. During 2022-2023 c£50k was distributed to charities. The recycling company will be changed from April 2024 onwards moving from a Dutch to a Sheffield based company. This will also contribute to the Council's reduction of emissions through contracted transport activities.

4.2. Crematoria – capital plans

- 4.2.1. Cremators have a lifespan of approximately 20 years. The current installation cost of a cremator and ancillary plant is c.£1M. A further £1.5M maintenance and rebricking costs are usual over the whole life of the plant.
- 4.2.2. Replacement cremators will be required no later than.

Crematorium	Years	Number
Maple Park	20	1
Skipton	15	2
Stonefall	20	2
Woodlands	5	2

- 4.2.3. There are three methods of cremation available in the UK. Gas fired cremators are the established method of heating cremation chambers and electrical cremators are newer but established technology with both using flame to cremate. Resomation, also known as water cremation or alkaline hydrolysis uses an alkaline solution to reduce a body to ash. Although established in North America, this is a very new method of cremation method which is being introduced to the UK.
- 4.2.4. The service will work alongside colleagues from climate change and energy teams to research the options for each of the different cremation methods including energy use, sustainability and environmental impact as well as practical and public perceptions of introducing new technologies.
- 4.2.5. Skipton Crematorium has the smallest chapel of the four crematoria. A legacy capital investment project which had gained planning permission, proposed extending the chapel to provide cover for larger congregations who currently observe funeral services from outside.
- 4.2.6. The plan is that the chapel seating will be increased from 64 to 114 mourners which will reduce the number of services with outside mourners and provide a chapel size comparable with crematoria in West Yorkshire. A review is ongoing to look to progress this project.

4.3. Cemeteries – an overview

- 4.3.1. North Yorkshire Council is a burial authority (Local Government Act 1972 Sec 214) and is responsible for the maintenance and upkeep of burial grounds.

4.3.2 The Council operates 18 open cemeteries.

- Fewston (Blubberhouses)
- Goldsborough
- Grinton
- Grove Road (Harrogate)
- Harlow Hill (Harrogate)
- Ingleton
- Kirby Malzeard
- Kirby Overblow
- Knaresborough
- Lark Hill (Ripon)
- Larpool (Whitby)
- Pateley Bridge
- Richmond
- Ripon
- Stonefall (Harrogate)
- Waltonwrays (Skipton)
- Wensley
- Woodlands (Scarborough)

4.3.3 Most of these cemeteries are open to new burials. A number have limited new space available and are restricted to interments in occupied family graves or burial of ashes. There are further closed cemeteries in Scarborough at Manor Road and Dean Road. Stonefall has an adjoining cemetery which is maintained by the Commonwealth Graves Commission. There are other open cemeteries operated and maintained by Town Councils at Boroughbridge and Filey.

4.3.4 **Table 2. Number of burials 2023 -2024 to date**

		Craven	Richmond	Harrogate	Scarborough	Total
Apr	Full	0	1	7	7	15
	Ashes	3	1	14	9	27
May	Full	2	2	12	7	23
	Ashes	8	1	14	18	41
Jun	Full	2	1	9	13	25
	Ashes	8	0	10	12	30
Jul	Full	5	0	13	9	27
	Ashes	6	0	15	9	30
Aug	Full	2	0	19	6	27
	Ashes	2	0	14	17	33
Sep	Full	1	0	6	13	20
	Ashes	3	0	16	10	29
Oct	Full	6	0	9	6	21
	Ashes	2	0	20	8	30
Nov	Full	2	0	9	7	18
	Ashes	1	0	17	4	22
Dec	Full	1	0	17	10	28
	Ashes	2	0	18	7	27
Total	Full	21	4	101	78	204
	Ashes	35	2	138	94	269
		473				

4.4 Cemeteries – Capital Plans

- 4.4.1 There are several cemeteries which are reaching capacity. These were identified by legacy councils, and planning had already commenced on extensions and new sites.

Locality	Cemetery	Estimated years left
Scarborough	Larpool Lane, Whitby	3.4 years
	Woodlands, Scarborough	5.2 years
	Lawns, Filey	6.2 years
Harrogate	Pateley Bridge	2.7 years
	Stonefall	3.9 years
	Knaresborough	8.7 years
Craven	Ingleton	16 years
	Waltonwrays	18 years
Hambleton	No cemeteries	
Richmondshire	Wensley	20 years plus
Ryedale	No cemeteries	
Selby	No cemeteries	

- 4.4.2 Legacy capital funds are sufficient to cover the costs of Pateley Bridge for which plans, and pre-planning application are well advanced. A site at Whitby has been identified and work is currently underway with Highways to determine access solutions. Approval will be sought from capital board later this year as plans are finalised.
- 4.4.3 NY Highways will be contracted in each case to construct the cemetery, access works, roadways in the cemetery and memorial footings. This will allow the Council to prudently use capital funds to maximise the expansion programme and allow direct award to minimise the time frame to completion.

4.5 Closed Churchyards

- 4.5.1 The Council is currently responsible for the maintenance and upkeep of 78 closed churchyards. Under the Local Government Act (1974), Section 215, a Church of England Parochial Church Council (PCC) can apply to the Privy Council for an Order to close a churchyard to new burials. Within three months of the closure the PCC can pass the responsibility for maintenance and upkeep to a parish, community or county/country borough council. The churchyard remains consecrated ground and additional burials in existing graves are the responsibility of the parish incumbent. The maintenance of the grounds, boundary walls and memorial safety are the responsibility of the Council. Works other than normal maintenance are subject to the granting of a faculty from the relevant diocese.

4.6 Memorial Safety

- 4.6.1 The Local Authorities Cemetery Order (1997) gives the Council power to maintain or remove any memorial within its cemeteries and churchyards. The service has adopted a proportional approach to assessing and managing the risks, using the Ministry of Justice's guidance to survey over 90k memorials. Wherever possible owners will be contacted, and memorials will only be laid down if they present a significant risk to visitors.
- 4.6.2 During 2024-2025 the service will invest in a Council wide system to collate records into one place and efficiently record safety checks. This will transform this function from seven separate systems to one system using cloud-based software and phone apps to allow

efficient in-field monitoring and recording. This will require extensive mapping of CofE churchyards whose burial records are often not as comprehensive as municipal cemeteries.

4.7 Charter for the Bereaved

4.7.1 The Council has been awarded the Gold Charter for the Bereaved, issued by the Institute of Crematoria and Cemetery Management. Prior to LGR the award was held by Stonefall (Gold) and Skipton (Gold/Silver for cemeteries). Since 1 April 2023 the service has worked hard to achieve Gold standard for both crematoria and cemeteries across the whole service. Approximately one third of crematoria across the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland hold the charter.

4.8 Competition Markets Authority

4.8.1 An investigation by the CMA in 2019 was a result of identification of several concerns within the sector, including that prices for similar services differed between funeral directors and the way that information was provided made it hard for families to compare prices and choose the right combination of services.

4.8.2 The Funeral Market Investigation Order (2021) introduced a range of new legal obligations on funeral directors and crematorium operators to tackle the problems identified by the CMA. The Council is required to provide statutory quarterly returns to the CMA on the number and type of cremations carried out and publish price lists or certain services delivered in pdf format on its website.

5 IMPACT ON OTHER SERVICES/ORGANISATIONS

5.1 Grounds Maintenance

The maintenance of cemeteries and churchyards is carried out by a variety of internal services and external contractors. The service will work with Parks and Grounds over the next year to develop a Council wide strategy to maintenance.

6.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There are no financial implications arising directly from this report as it is for information only

7.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1. Maple Park LLP

Maple Park is currently constituted as a Limited Liability Partnership. During 2024-2025 a proposal will be tabled at Executive to wind the company up and transfer the assets into the Council.

8.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

8.1. Utility usage

The service is a major consumer of gas at three of the crematoria. Detailed analysis of utility consumption will be carried out to understand the impact of the operation. Comparison data from the electric cremator at Maple Park will provide a better understanding of future options for cremator replacement.

8.2. Biodiversity and nature recovery

Nationally, cemeteries provide 4% of accessible green space in England. A number of our cemeteries are in built-up areas and have been left undisturbed from pesticides etc for a number of years. The service will produce an action plan to develop the biodiversity and

nature recovery in cemeteries balanced with ensuring that the spaces continue to be seen as sacred and respectful so that residents can peacefully remember their loved ones.

9.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1. Rules and regulations for cemeteries will be revised during 2024-2025 to create a single standardised approach for management of graves and memorials and the granting of future exclusive rights of burial.

10.0 HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 Consultation on harmonisation of job roles within the service will take place during February and March 2024 with implementation from 1 April 2024.

11.0 RECOMMENDATION

- 11.1 To note the content of this report and the capital programme

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

[Local Government Act 1972 Sections 214,215](#)

[The Local Authorities' Cemeteries Order 1977](#)

[Statutory Guidance for Crematoria, Process Guidance Note \(5/2\) 12, Defra 2012](#)

[Managing the safety of Burial Ground Memorials, Ministry of Justice, 2009](#)

[ICCM Charter for the Bereaved](#)

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