

Meeting of:	Cabinet
Date of Meeting:	Monday, 25 April 2022
Relevant Scrutiny Committee:	Corporate Performance and Resources
Report Title:	Registration Service - Civil Funerals
Purpose of Report:	To propose introducing civil funeral ceremonies, to include: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Extending provision of non-statutory ceremonies to include funerals 2. Recruiting a team of bank staff to provide civil funeral celebrants 3. Establishing fee structure for civil funerals
Report Owner:	Councillor E. Williams - Cabinet Member for Legal, Regulatory and Planning Services
Responsible Officer:	Jeff Rees, Head of Democratic Services
Elected Member and Officer Consultation:	Chief Executive Monitoring Officer/Head of Legal and Democratic Services
Policy Framework:	This is a matter for Executive decision by Cabinet.
<p>Executive Summary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This report seeks Cabinet approval to introduce additional services and associated fees and charges within the Council's Registration Services department for 2022/23. • The proposed fees reflect the additional staff time and expertise necessary to design and deliver a funeral ceremony. • In the last 20 years, non-religious funerals have become the norm. As an established provider of ceremonies and civil celebrants, the Vale Registration Service is well placed to provide such a service and enter this market. 	

Recommendations

1. That Cabinet notes and considers the contents of this report.
2. That, in pursuance of recommendation 1, Cabinet approves the introduction of the additional services and associated fees for the Registration Service as detailed in this Report.

Reasons for Recommendations

1. To make Cabinet aware of the current situation regarding funeral ceremonies within the Vale of Glamorgan.
2. To improve the options available to both Vale of Glamorgan residents and non-residents in choosing the Vale of Glamorgan for a funeral and to obtain Cabinet's approval to introduce associated fees and charges.

1. Background

- 1.1** The 2011 census returns show just over 40% of Vale of Glamorgan residents choosing not to declare a religion or stating that they had 'no religion'. Despite the tradition for funerals as a religious rite of passage, there has for many years been a move towards non-religious funerals that focus on the life of the deceased person rather than a deity. While Humanism was originally used to frame non-religious funerals, there has since been a development into civil funerals that do not require a framework of beliefs. These funerals might include a hymn or a prayer but the person who has died will always be the focus of attention.
- 1.2** Civil celebrants mostly work on a self-employed basis and rely on funeral directors to refer families to them. There are a small number of civil funeral celebrants working in the Vale but funeral directors report that it can be difficult to find someone to carry out a civil funeral service. Funeral directors also report risk associated with using celebrants based outside of the area. The added travel involved when a celebrant is based in Cardiff or Caerphilly means an increased risk of delay or failure to attend. If the celebrant encounters heavy traffic or is hindered in another way, the funeral could be delayed. This is a significant consideration as Cardiff and Glamorgan Memorial Park charge a fee of £310 for late funerals that run over their allotted time. This charge is paid by the family of the late funeral to the family of the delayed funeral.
- 1.3** Funeral directors report that availability and reliability are the top considerations when procuring the services of a celebrant on behalf of a family. The proportion of civil funerals varies between the different areas of the county with 50-60% of families using funeral directors in Penarth and Dinas Powys requesting civil funerals, rising to 75-90% in Barry.

- 1.4 The Registration Service currently has a team of 16 Relief Registrars who carry out ceremonies at the Civic Offices in Barry as well as more than 35 licenced wedding venues across the Vale. The vast majority of these are wedding ceremonies which we have a statutory duty to provide but non-statutory ceremonies, such as renewal of vows and baby naming ceremonies, are also offered. Most of these ceremonies take place at weekends but most members of the team have weekday availability.
- 1.5 This report sets out proposals to introduce Civil Funeral Ceremonies within the Council's Registration Service and makes recommendations for associated fees and charges.

2. Key Issues for Consideration

Funeral Ceremonies

- 2.1 It is proposed the Registration Service offer Civil Funeral Ceremonies to include a planning meeting, composition of a eulogy (if required) and a Registrar to conduct the ceremony.
- 2.2 The Registrar would meet with the family of the deceased to gather the information needed to write a eulogy. This could be a telephone call or video meeting, especially while social distancing remains a consideration. The eulogy is then composed, making creative use of a set template. The next step is to prepare an order of service that includes chosen pieces of music, this is submitted to the family for approval. The final part of the commitment is to deliver the funeral service. Currently most funerals take place exclusively at the crematorium or cemetery but there may also be a requirement to attend the funeral home before proceeding to the committal service.
- 2.3 In terms of costs, the cost to a family for the standard services of a civil funeral celebrant is in the range of £150 - £190. Some celebrants offer a short committal service (approx. 15 minutes) with no eulogy for £90. A typical funeral arrangement, including writing a eulogy and attending the service, should be around 4 hours work. Most cremation services are 40 minutes duration, but an additional cost could be added when a 90 minute service is requested. Similarly, a shorter, 15 minute committal ceremony could be offered for a lower fee.
- 2.4 As an extension to this service, a short informal ceremony to accompany the scatter of cremated remains could be offered. The option to scatter cremated remains at the crematorium where the funeral took place has steadily declined over the last three decades with most families choosing to have the cremated remains collected from the crematorium for private disposal. Possibly fuelled by television and film storylines, many choose to scatter in a public place beloved by the deceased. This has resulted in approaches to staff working in parks and coastal areas being asked for permission to scatter. Formalising the arrangements around this would be welcomed by the relevant managers and would provide reassurance to the bereaved that they had behaved legally and respectfully.

2.5 These services would also see increased revenue for the Vale of Glamorgan Council.

2.6 Proposed fees:

Cremation committal or short graveside service only (approx.15 minutes – no eulogy.) - £75

Cost to the Authority for providing a Registrar for 3 hours: 3 x £12.60 = £37.80

Standard cremation or graveside service (45 minutes max.) - £135

Funeral home followed by cremation or burial service / longer cremation service (90 minutes max.) - £175

Cost to the Authority for providing a Registrar for 4 hours: 4 x £12.60 = £50.40

Administrative support: i.e. diary management, income management and liaising with funeral directors: 1 hour @ £12.60

Summary:

Service length	Registrar cost	Admin cost	Total cost to provide	Proposed Vale of Glamorgan Council fee	Comparable private celebrant fee
15 minutes	£37.80	£12.60	£50.40	£75	£90
45 minutes	£50.40	£12.60	£63.00	£135	£150
90 minutes	£50.40	£12.60	£63.00	£175	£190
Scatter (as part of funeral arrangement)	£37.80	-	£37.80	£45	£100 (Estimated)
Scatter (standalone service)	£37.80	£12.60	£50.40	£60	£100 (Estimated)

3. How do proposals evidence the Five Ways of Working and contribute to our Well-being Objectives?

3.1 It is necessary to review fees on an annual basis to ensure the continuation and sustainability of services in light of increasing costs. It is particularly important this year, with the Council and communities feeling the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. This is undertaken in the context of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act which requires the Council to consider five ways of working when making decisions.

- 3.2** Thinking to the longer-term is a key consideration when setting fees and charges, to minimise the impact on the Council’s ability to provide services in the future that the current budgetary pressures present. The proposals also seek to further the Council’s Well-being Outcomes contained within the Corporate Plan. Fees and charges have been proposed to further these objectives, within the context of the financial cost of doing so.
- 3.3** There are no specific climate change implications arising from the fee increases proposed.

4. Resources and Legal Considerations

Financial

- 4.1** The fees to be introduced that are outlined in this report assist in reducing to the budgetary pressures within the Directorate.

Employment

- 4.2** There are no employment implications arising from the proposals in this report.

Legal (Including Equalities)

- 4.3** Under relevant legislation the Council is permitted to charge for certain services it provides. Full details of the relevant legislation on fees and charges is contained in the Income Generation and Commercial Opportunities Strategy.

5. Background Papers

None.