Agenda Item No: 9

Meeting of:	**Resources Scrutiny Committee**
Date of Meeting:	**Wednesday, 16 September 2026**
Relevant Scrutiny Committee:	Resources Scrutiny Committee
Urgent Decision Procedure Used (If yes, why)	Not Applicable
Item Type	Part I
Report Title:	Enhancing Support to Residents During Bereavement
Portfolio Holder:	Cabinet Member for Community Engagement, Equalities and Regulatory Services
Strategic Leadership Team:	Director of Corporate Resources
Lead Officer:	Head of Democratic Services Registrations Manager/Superintendent Registrar

1.0 What is this report about?

1.1 This report is aiming to further develop the existing support available to residents following a bereavement, a key life event which will impact upon all residents within the Vale of Glamorgan at some point in their life, in line with the Council's aspiration with Vale 2030 of "supporting and protecting those who need us".

1.2 The Registration Service is seeking to expand its existing service offering in broadening well-being support, including the development of further resources and materials to signpost to support available for people who experience loss and also introducing a Civil Funeral service, which will be made available to all residents in the Vale of Glamorgan, and offer the opportunity for a personalised and meaningful ceremony by creating a simple service or eulogy and delivering in the relevant venue, such as a Crematorium, within the county.

1.3 Alongside the proposed Civil, the Council is looking to extend its offer to provide a committal service for public health funerals, whereby funerals are provided by local authorities for people who have passed away and have no next of kin, or whose next of kin, relatives or friends are unable or unwilling to make the necessary arrangements for a funeral, offering this service to all residents regardless of their personal situation upon death.

2.0 What are the Recommendations?

	Recommendations – What and How?	Reason for Recommendation – Why?
1	T H A T Resources Scrutiny Committee consider the proposals around enhancing support to residents.	To enable Resources Scrutiny Committee to consider the proposals around enhancing support to residents.
2	T H A T having considered the proposals, Resources Scrutiny Committee either endorse the proposals around enhancing support to residents and refer the report and remaining recommendations 3-6 below for consideration of Cabinet endorsement, or provide further recommendations for Cabinet to also consider prior to any proposals being finalised.	To enable Cabinet to consider the feedback and consider any subsequent changes from the Scrutiny Committee.
3	T H A T subject to endorsement of Recommendation (2), Cabinet agree for the Council to undertake Civic Funeral Services, including Public Health Funerals, for residents of the Vale of Glamorgan on a 12-month trial basis.	To allow for the Council to explore the feasibility of this Service in the mid to long term.
4	T H A T subject to endorsement of Recommendation (2), Cabinet notes the existing Well-being provision offered during the bereavement process and endorses the extension of this offering.	To allow for the Council to support residents during periods of bereavement.
5	T H A T subject to endorsement of Recommendation (2), Cabinet endorse that the Council's Registration Services Fees and Charges be updated to include the relevant charges as outlined in Appendix B.	To allow for the Council to charge for services provided.
6	T H A T subject to endorsement of Recommendation (2),Cabinet agree that delegated authority be granted to Head of Democratic Services (in their capacity as Proper Officer for the Registration Service) to make minor service revisions in-year in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Community Engagement, Equalities and Regulatory Services.	To undertake a continuous improvement approach to incremental change during a trial period.

3.0 What is the background to this report?

3.1 Civil Registration is a statutory function of the Council governed by the Birth and Death Regulations Act 1953 and related regulations, with responsibility shared between central government (General Register Office) and Local Authorities.

3.2 The Registration Service currently delivers statutory functions relating to births, stillbirths, deaths, marriages, civil partnerships, and the delivery of citizenship ceremonies. The service covers all qualifying events that occur within the Vale of Glamorgan.

3.3 The Council must ensure that every death that occurs in their area is registered, in an official register, creating a legal record of death which is required for funeral arrangements, estate administration and government purposes. This entails close partnership working with Local Health Boards, including representative from Primary Care and Emergency Care teams, Medical Examiners and with the Regional Coroners Services (hosting by Rhondda Cynon Taf) for example.

3.4 Upon the notification of a death from a partner organisation, the Council liaises with the next of kin of the bereaved relative to register the death in an in-person appointment as quickly as possible, and subsequently issues certification for burial or cremation, which allows for any funeral to proceed. It is important to note that the General Register Office are exploring the telephony-based death registration appointments, with a target go live date of Autumn 2027, which provide another channel for next of kin to register deaths.

3.5 Between 1 January 2025 and 31 December 2025, the Registration Service registered over 1000 deaths of residents across the Vale of Glamorgan. Each registration represents direct contact with bereaved families, friends and loved ones, highlighting the significant reach of the service at times of vulnerability. This level of contact presents a meaningful opportunity to extend support beyond the statutory registration process, offering families additional choice, reassurance and continuity during the bereavement journey.

3.6 The Registration team is well-established, comprising of 22 staff in total, of whom 14 are employed on a relief basis, working on an as-and-when-required arrangement dependent upon organisational need. This staffing model provides flexibility based upon demand, while maintaining resilience and continuity of service delivery.

The existing pool of experienced relief registrars brings a strong and relevant skill set that can be effectively utilised within a civil celebrant funeral service model, as Registrars are:

- Highly experienced in public speaking
- Confident delivering ceremonies to large audiences during key life events
- Fully competent in delivering services in both English and Welsh.

3.7 Whilst death can occur during all stages of life, it is important to consider that the Vale of Glamorgan has an increasingly aging population, with over 20% of its residents aged 65 and over. When considering demographic changes, it should also be noted that in 2021, 47.9% of Vale of Glamorgan residents reported having "No religion", making it the most common response in this local authority area (up from 32.9% in 2011).

3.8 The societal change in moving towards an increased number of non-religious services has led to an increase in the number of celebrants, both locally and nationally, as people are favouring bespoke, story led ceremonies over traditional religious services. A civil funeral is one that is 'driven by the wishes, beliefs and values of the deceased and their family, not by the beliefs and ideology of the person conducting the funeral'. The UK celebrant landscape comprises approximately 3,000-4,000 active Celebrants across wedding, funeral, and family ceremonies (including around 500 Humanist Celebrants). This figure, while growing, represents just a fraction of the industry's potential when viewed through the lens of international comparisons and demographic trends.

3.9 In reflection of this, engagement with local funeral directors confirms that there is already a significant number of celebrants operating across the Vale of Glamorgan. However, the Registration Service is uniquely positioned to offer competitive pricing, extensive experience in life event ceremonies, bilingual services, and a strong, resilient workforce able to cover all areas within Vale of Glamorgan. Unlike standalone celebrants, a local authority led service offers the advantage of a team-based model, ensuring continuity and resilience. This approach mitigates risks associated with illness, emergency situations or unavailability, providing reassurance to families at a critical time.

3.10 The increase in available celebrants is anticipated to be sustained for some time, as UK Government are currently consulting upon wedding law reform, which would remove the need for licenced venues and move towards licensed individuals, increasing the presence of independent celebrants. Whilst the legislative timeline is still to be confirmed, there is a clear need to develop a robust, skilled registration workforce that is fully equipped to operate in the celebrant space while continuing to deliver statutory duties.

4.0 <u>What issues are there to be considered?</u>

4.1 In enhancing the support provided to residents during periods of bereavement; we are looking to deliver the outlined programme of support to bereaved residents, including:

4.2 **Tell Us Once Service –** delivered in partnership with Department of Works and Pensions to deliver the full 'Tell Us Once' service, this service is a one stop shop to inform relevant government departments that someone has died, relieving the family of endless phone calls to various agencies, reducing the need for repeated difficult conversations. This also relates to internal Council operating processes with this service notifying a range of areas such as Council Tax and Election Teams to prevent unnecessary contact and undue stress. The Vale of Glamorgan Registration Service consistently ranks amongst the top 10 districts in the United Kingdom in information provided by the Department of Works and Pensions for the quality of its Tell Us Once provision.

4.3 **Child burials/funerals –** during the death registration process, we work with the family of a bereaved child in administering a grant, whereby they are entitled to receive a contribution towards funeral and other related costs. We also work with burial authorities in Vale of Glamorgan to ensure that fees relating to the burial and cremation of children are also paid (based upon the memorandum of understanding between Welsh Government, Welsh Local Government Association and One Voice Wales). Whilst the number remains fortunately low, this ensures that during periods of personal difficulty, we are supporting individuals who have lost a child to remove

the stress financial burden associated with the burial and subsequent funeral.

4.4 **Death bed marriages/civil partnership –** We offer an out of hours service in close liaison with local medical facilities and hospices for example whereby a person cannot be moved to a licenced venue as they are seriously ill and close to death and unable to recover. This involves working with families in a swift manner in a highly emotive environment and is often undertaken to support people with their religious or personal wishes, legitimising family arrangements, gaining legal recognition of their relationship or securing inheritance rights.

4.5 **Faith deaths –** We also offer an out of hours service in close liaison with local medical facilities, hospices and Coroners service to register deaths for individuals who require rapid burial, often within 24 hours, due to religious reasons such as Islamic and Jewish burials. This support ensures that we are able to offer a service for all residents whereby they are able to be buried or cremated in line with their religious beliefs.

4.6 **Public Health Funerals -** Public health funerals are provided by local authorities for people who have passed away and have no next of kin, or whose next of kin, relatives or friends are unable or unwilling to make the necessary arrangements for a funeral. They are designed to protect public health and are important in ensuring that all individuals are treated with dignity and respect, regardless of their circumstances. Last year, there were 16 public health funerals that were undertaken in the Vale of Glamorgan, and the Council is proposing to celebrate their lives as part of these funerals through a dignified service.. The anticipated cost of celebration at this service would be approximately £100 (although this may need be adjusted to include future pay and mileage increases).

4.7 **Improving our prevention based, signposting service offer –** whilst the service currently supports to various agencies that are able to support during periods of bereavement such as Age UK and At a Loss during the death registration and distribute materials provided by agencies when available, the Service is proposing to enhancing this provision by:

4.7.1 Developing an “in-house” publication of local, regional and national organisations to support individuals during bereavement. To note, this has also been undertaken for the birth registration service in conjunction with the Council’s Social Care teams.

4.7.2 Reviewing how preventative information, including signposting to external information, can be provided at the point of appointment booking to ensure next of kin are supported ahead of the registration process.

4.7.3 Further developing the Council’s public website surrounding registrations to include increased information signposting to information to support individuals during this key life event.

4.8 **Funeral Celebrant Service –** the Service will be seeking to offer small, bespoke ceremonies to individuals who may wish to have a civil service for a burial or cremation. This would be customer led and entail working alongside the next of kin to understand the history of the deceased, and tailor a service to reflect their lives. This ceremony type would be undertaken in the same ethos of the wedding ceremonies offered by the Council, whereby a party would arrange an appointment and work with the celebrant to design a reading based upon a variety of options

available and personalised to the individual circumstances.

However, it is important to ensure that this Service is promoted to residents appropriately and ethically. It would not be explicitly offered to individuals during the death registration process, but Members of the public would become aware of the service offering through a variety of mediums including the Council's website, promotion via social media channels alongside posters and leaflets in key public spaces.

This work would be undertaken by existing relief staff and be offered to residents on a county wide basis through either Welsh or English. This workforce offers a competitive advantage to private celebrants due to their positive reputation as a result of wedding ceremonies, geographical coverage, ability to cover a range of dates and times, and resilience in adapting to short notice changes. Several Local Authorities across the United Kingdom already deliver this service, including Cardiff Council and Flintshire Council for example.

The proposed costings for each Celebrant ceremony would be £180 (as outlined in the updated Registration Fees included in Appendix B), a competitive price whilst operating in a busy market.

4.9 **Remote Registrations of Deaths –** The General Registry Office are currently undertaking a significant transformation programme, with a core principle being the Digital Registration Service, including system changes to facilitate the introduction of remote (telephone / video call) registration for the registration of deaths. This is anticipated to go live in Autumn 2026, with the Council seeking to go live in a graduated approach.

5.0 How has evidence been used to inform the report, including the views of others?

5.1 A range of research has been undertaken in developing the proposals outlined, including wider market research, including in conjunction with partner organisations and local funeral directors.

5.2 We have explored practical delivery requirements associated with funeral ceremonies in order to understand workforce support, training and well-being implications to staff involved as conducting a funeral is an emotive subject matter. .

5.3 In the last 12-18 months, we have been approached by a number of residents to understand if we offer this service and have had to subsequently decline as the delivery model was not developed, meaning the risk involved was too significant.

6.0 What are the next steps if the recommendations are approved?

6.1 If agreed, we will look to develop the range of services as outlined above and deliver a range of communications including via the Council's external social media channels and public website to make residents aware.

6.2 Following implementation, we will seek to develop ongoing qualitative and quantitative monitoring methods to evaluate the effectiveness of the service as part of a 12-month trial and seek future Cabinet endorsement if this is to become a permanent service post-trial.

7.0 How does this report support the Vale 2030 and Reshaping?

7.1 The proposed service offerings outlined support Vale 2030 in a number of ways, but most notably “Supporting and protecting those who need us”, in providing information, advice and assistance during key, emotive life events.

7.2 This also supports the Target Operating Model as outlined within the Reshaping prospectus, due to its focus upon enhancing both the customer experience (in line with the principles of brilliant basics and tone of voice), and potential income generation opportunities which would be re-invested within the service to contribute to its ongoing delivery.

8.0 How does this demonstrate the Five Ways of Working?

8.1 The service offering outlined within the report is taking a long-term view of emerging trends in population changes and wider market activity, is being considered in collaboration with key stakeholders whilst involving residents in the design and delivery of the service offering. The improvement in wider support provision is seeking to prevent future challenges arising for individuals in an integrated manner, maximising existing tools and resources.

Resources

9.0 Finance

9.1 The changes to the wider preventative offer as outlined within the report will be delivered within existing infrastructure, staff resources and budgets, so will not result in any additional financial expenditure.

9.2 Whilst the relief staff cost to officiate Public Health funerals will be at a loss (approximately £1600 based upon 2025/26), this is anticipated to be offset by additional income from Funeral Civil services.

9.3 The proposed cost for a Funeral Civil Service is £180; this is based upon local market research placing costs between £150-£300 and is on a full cost recovery basis when considering preparatory work and the delivery of the ceremony. Based on the number of deaths registered during 2025/26, if the Council was to undertake these duties at 5% of ceremonies, this would generate an additional £12k per annum income for the Local Authority.

10.0 Workforce

10.1 The Registration team is well-established, comprising of 22 staff in total, of whom 14 are employed on a relief basis, working on an as-and-when-required arrangement dependent upon organisational need. This staffing model provides flexibility based upon demand, while maintaining resilience and continuity of service delivery.

10.2 Due to the nature of relief work, it is up for the individual postholder to consider if they would like to deliver this kind of service, as this represents a change from their existing commitments. Staff have been consulted and engaged during the design of these proposals and a number have expressed a desire to undertake this kind of work and will be trained as appropriate.

10.3 Staff will also be supported through regular touch points with the Superintendent Registrar as they will be dealing with emotive individuals who are often experiencing traumatic life events and will be able to access the Council's Well-being services if needed.

11.0 Legal and Equalities

11.1 Does an Equalities Impact Assessment need to be completed? If not, why? An Equalities Impact Assessment has been completed and is available in Appendix C.

11.2 The Council's Registration Service is governed by the Birth and Death Regulations Act 1953, which sets out the duties required to be undertaken. Consultation with the General Registry Office has been undertaken and they are content with the proposals outlined are not in contravention of the Council's legislative requirements. In addition, there has been subsequent consideration of the Public Health (Control of Disease Act) 1984, and Cremation (England and Wales) Regulations 2008.

11.3 Whilst there are no formal legislative requirements surrounding celebrant models, the Council will keep abreast of any consequential changes which may impact upon service delivery, including Marriage Reform and Terminally Ill Adults Bill.

Key Contacts

12.1 Who are the primary officers to contact with any comments and/or queries on the report?

Lead Officer:	Democratic Services Officer:
Hayley Jefferies, Superintendent Registrar/Registration Service Manager 01446 709166 hjefferies@valeofglamorgan.gov.uk James Langridge-Thomas, Operational Manager (and Statutory Head of) Democratic Services jlangridge-thomas@valeofglamorgan.gov.uk 01446709457	

Appendix

Appendix A – High Level Delivery Plan

Appendix B – Registration Fees and Charges

Appendix C – Equality Impact Assessment

Background Documents

Major boost to economy through wedding law reform - GOV.UK

How life has changed in Vale of Glamorgan: Census 2021

Public Health Funerals – Good Practice Guidance, UK Government

The UK Celebrant Industry State of Play Report 2025/26 Academy of Modern Celebrancy

About Civil Funerals, Institute of Civil Funerals

Major Boost to Economy through Wedding Law Reform, UK Government

Appendix A – High Level Delivery Plan

Workstream	Activity	Responsible	Target Completion Date
Communication and Engagement	Design digital assets for social media campaign raising awareness of service offered	Superintendent Registrar Communications	October 2026
	Launch social media campaign through Council channels	Communications	October 2026
	Develop ongoing programme of communication throughout year	Communications	March 2027
	Update the Council's website to include revised details of services offered	Superintendent Registrar Communications	July 2026
	Develop and print signposting materials to utilised across the Council estate and for Registration team usage	Superintendent Registrar Communications	September 2026
Workforce	To carry out relevant training for the relief staff who wish to carry out funerals	Superintendent Registrar	August/September 2026
	Work with Finance to create new cost centre to monitor income and spend for new changes	Superintendent Registrar Finance	September 2026
	To make staff aware of well-being support available when undertaking role	Superintendent Registrar	August 2026
Monitoring and Review	To develop a monitoring framework considering Quantitative and Qualitative feedback and embed data capture methodologies	Superintendent Registrar Operational Manager – Democratic Services	September 2026
	Design short feedback form for service users to understand their experiences	Superintendent Registrar	July 2026
	Signpost to feedback methods on a regular basis and share learning amongst all team	All Registration Services staff	Ongoing

Service	Comments		2026/27 Rate £
Registrars			
Marriage and civil partnership ceremonies			
De-commissioned rooms	Dunraven room (up to 75 guests)	Monday to Thursday	210.00
	Dunraven room (up to 75 guests)	Friday	260.00
	Dunraven room (up to 75 guests)	Saturday	260.00
	Enhanced Southerndown room – committee room 3 (20 guests)	Monday to Thursday	180.00
	Enhanced Southerndown room – committee room 3 (20 guests)	Friday	180.00
	Enhanced Southerndown room – committee room 3 (20 guests)	Saturday	180.00
Additional services	Biodegradable confetti (1 cone)		3.00
	Biodegradable confetti (5 cone)		12.00
Approved Premises	Monday to Thursday		620.00
	Friday		620.00

Service	Comments		2026/27 Rate £
	Saturday		620.00
	Sunday & Bank Holiday		620.00
Pre-ceremony consultation (45-minute meeting)	During office hours		47.00
	After 4:30pm Monday-Friday		68.00
	Weekends		68.00
Family history search			23.00
First class post			1.85
First class signed for			4.80
Special delivery guaranteed by 1pm			18.00
Airmail			6.00
Copy certificates of entries in the registers of births, deaths, and marriages	statutory fee		13.00
Proof of life for foreign pensions			11.65
Document certification	per document		6.80
Ceremony Enhancements			52.00
Funeral Celebrant	Monday - Sunday		190.00

Introduction

1. What are you assessing? Enhancing Support to Residents During Bereavement, including Civil Funeral Services and improved bereavement support.

2. Responsible (Name): Hayley Jefferies – Superintendent/ James Langridge-Thomas

3. Job Title: Superintendent Registrar (Registration Manager) / Operational Manager (and Statutory Head of) Democratic Services/Registration Services Proper Officer.

4. Team: Democratic Services

5. Manager: Victoria Davidson, Monitoring Officer and Head of Legal and Democratic Services

6. Date: June 2026

About Your Proposal

7. What is the purpose of your proposal? To enhance the Council's support to residents during bereavement by expanding services, including civil funeral provision, improved signposting, and dignified public health funerals.

8. Why is your proposal needed? Bereavement affects all residents, and the Registration Service has significant contact with individuals at vulnerable times, presenting an opportunity to provide additional support and choice

9. What are the intended outcomes of this proposal?

- Improved resident wellbeing during bereavement
- Increased access to affordable, meaningful funeral services
- Enhanced awareness of support services
- Dignified provision for all residents, including those without next of kin
- Potential income generation to sustain services

10. Who does the proposal affect? All residents of the Vale of Glamorgan, particularly bereaved individuals, families, vulnerable residents, and those without support networks.

11. Will the proposals affect how other organization's work? Yes – funeral directors, support organisations (e.g., bereavement charities), health services, and government agencies (e.g., DWP via Tell Us Once).

12. Will the proposal affect how you deliver services? Yes – expands Registration Service delivery to include funeral celebrant services and enhanced support functions.

13. Will the proposal impact upon other policies or practices? Aligns with bereavement support practices, equality duties, and public health funeral responsibilities.

14. How will you achieve the proposed changes? Through a 12-month trial, staff training, use of existing workforce, communications campaigns, and incremental service development.

15. Does the proposal assist or inhibit our ability to meet our public sector equality duty to eliminate discrimination; advance equality; and foster good relations? Supports elimination of discrimination, advances equality by widening access to services, and fosters good relations through inclusive, culturally sensitive provision.

Evidence

What evidence is available for you about the needs of people with different characteristics to evaluate your proposal? Where are the gaps in the evidence?

16. Local data and Public Engagement

- Over 1000 deaths registered annually
- Increasing ageing population (20%+ aged 65+)
- 47.9% of residents report no religion
- Engagement with funeral directors and residents
- Existing public health funeral data and service demand

17. National data

- Census 2021 demographic trends
- Growth in non-religious ceremonies and celebrant market
- UK public health funeral guidance
- Equality and demographic trends (ageing population, socio-economic factors)

Further details of data are outlined within the report. Gaps include limited formal equality-specific consultation; future monitoring required.

Impact Assessment

18. Age
Positive – older residents are more likely to require bereavement services; proposal improves access and support.

19. Disability
Positive – improved support, reduced administrative burden (e.g., Tell Us Once), and accessible services.

20. Gender reassignment
Neutral to positive – inclusive, person-centred approach respects identity and relationships.

21. Marriage and civil partnership
Neutral – no discriminatory impact; services available to all.

22. Pregnancy and maternity
Positive – support for bereaved parents, including child funeral assistance.

23. Race
Positive – accommodates diverse cultural practices, including rapid burial requirements.

24. Religion or belief
Positive – supports both religious (e.g., rapid burial) and non-religious preferences (civil funerals).

25. Sex
Neutral – services equally accessible.

26. Sexual orientation
Positive – inclusive of all family structures and non-traditional relationships.

27. Socio-economic considerations
Positive – affordable (£180) services and public health funerals improve access for low-income residents.

28. Welsh language
Positive – bilingual service delivery (Welsh and English) ensures compliance and promotes language use.

29. Human rights
Positive – ensures dignity, respect, and fair treatment in death (particularly for public health funerals).

30.What, if anything, can be done to promote a positive impact?

- Public awareness campaigns
- Accessible information resources
- Continued engagement with communities
- Staff training in inclusive practice

31.What, if anything, can be done to limit any negative impact?

- Monitor service uptake across groups
- Ensure fair pricing
- Maintain sensitivity in promotion

32.Is there a need for more favourable treatment to achieve equal outcomes? (disability only)

Yes, where required (e.g., accessible formats, additional support during processes).

33.Overall will the impact of your proposal be positive, negative or neutral?

The proposal delivers a **strong positive equality impact**, particularly through improved accessibility, affordability, inclusivity, and dignity in bereavement services, with minimal risk of negative impact if appropriately monitored.

34.How will you monitor progress in delivering your proposal and its impact on citizens?

- Service uptake data
- Feedback from residents and stakeholders
- Equality monitoring indicators
- Review after 12-month trial