

Report subject	Poole Crematorium - update and next stage opportunity
Meeting date	26 November 2025
Status	Public Report
Executive summary	<p>To feedback to Cabinet summary results of early market engagement completed in April 2024 and current service performance.</p> <p>To seek Cabinet approval to go to market to procure a concessionaire to operate Poole Crematorium, enabling the reintroduction of cremation services at the site through a third-party provider.</p>
Recommendations	<p>It is RECOMMENDED that Cabinet:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Note the feedback from the completed Early Market Engagement exercise. (b) Approve the procurement of a concession to operate from Poole Crematorium, Gravel Hill, Poole (c) Delegate authority to the Director of Environment, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Communities, to finalise the concession specification and undertake the procurement process. (d) Agree to receive a future further report on evaluated bids, and if appropriate approve the award of contract.
Reason for recommendations	To allow officers to take forward a market offer to inform Council decision making as to the future of the Poole Crematorium site, in light of ongoing public, business and political interest in resecuring the cremator(s) facility.

Portfolio Holder(s):	Councillor Sandra Moore – Portfolio Holder for Communities
Corporate Director	Glynn Barton - Chief Operations Officer
Report Authors	Kate Langdown Director of Environment Ian Poultney – Head of Strategic Development Stuart Bickel – Head of Procurement & Contract Management Marta Patsalis – Management Accountant Chantelle Carruthers – Finance Manager Operations
Wards	Council-wide
Classification	For decision

Background

1. Poole Crematorium ceased operation in 2020 due to cremator infrastructure failings. Since closure, bereaved families have retained access to the Halo Hall at the location for ceremonial services with conveyancing of the deceased to Bournemouth Crematorium for a cremation.
2. The site remains under council ownership and retains the necessary planning designation for crematorium use.
3. Multiple reports have been considered by Cabinet as detailed in Background Papers exploring business cases and investment options to reinstate cremators at the site with ongoing public, business and political interest in securing a viable solution.
4. Any solution needs to be mindful that, in finding a reinvestment solution to the cremators, its income surpluses are linked to funding broader Council services and the wider bereavement services including cemeteries management for which there is reducing income to support maintenance directly linked to finite burial capacity.

Early market engagement activity

5. In January 2024 the then Leader and Deputy Leader led an opening engagement session with sector and community representatives at the Halo Hall in Poole the purpose being:

For BCP Council to explore and discuss different views on how the market is developing and evolving and future needs, and how other companies or organisations may partner BCP Council or take responsibility for some or all areas of the bereavement care service.

6. BCP Procurement published a Prior Information Notice (PIN) in February 2024 proposing a consultation with the market. The PIN had UK-wide coverage. The PIN was live for 4 weeks allowing businesses and organisations that express an

interest to receive a document that outlines the engagement work BCP Council are undertaking in relation to its Bereavement Service as a whole.

Responses April 2024

7. The following formal responses were received:

- 5 responses from churches or faith groups
- 1 response from a software supplier
- 1 response from a consultant who would carry out a strategic review of service
- 2 responses that could be viewed as offering new ways of working, outsourcing etc

8. The following summary responses from faith groups were received:

- Large elderly population and young people turning to more traditional funerals – should think of Dorset residents as well.
- People want a service close to where they have lived and it is disrespectful to move somebody on final journey – families deterred from using Poole.
- Large income generator for BCP and should fund Poole cremators from budgets/ reserves/ borrowing.
- Poole used as contingency for Bournemouth (also has ageing cremators)
- Should sell or lease service to private company (less cost of new Poole cremators).
- BCP provision is for greater good of community and is more affordable than others, should exploit monopoly position.
- Should prevent other companies exploiting their positions.
- Offer more traditional and longer services, also services of remembrance.
- Should think of carbon footprint and promote services better.

9. The following summary responses from interested commercial solutions were received:

Two Commercial Operators expressed an interest in some or all of the Bereavement Service. Their views can be best summarised by the following four options:

- Joint venture/concession
- Outright Sale
- Lease of selected Sites & Facilities

10. There was a general acceptance that the overall bereavement market is shifting and that like the rest of the business's involved BCP must adapt to these changes in order to maintain any market share and meet the needs of its communities.

Subsequent and supplementary approaches

11. Follow up from interested parties from the PIN exercise has been received. In addition, a new party has approached the Council expressing interest in the facility for which informal communication has been undertaken.

Performance & financial review of service

12. The table below details Bereavement Service demand serviced by local providers per calendar year. For BCP Bereavement Services this shows a year-on-year reduction in demand. Noting that in 2024 demand reduced across three of the four local providers with Weymouth Crematorium the only facility to secure a small increase.

Year	BCP Crematorium	Harbourview	New Milton	Weymouth
2021	4446	1414	0	1334
2022	3730	1638	922	1389
2023	3366	1720	1,581	1328
2024	2998	1683	1,568	1334

Source The Cremation Society National Statistics

13. The table below details BCP Bereavement Care Service location demand split by calendar year. The table evidences an increasing trend demand for ceremonial only services at Poole with onwads conveyancing to Bournemouth Crematorium.

Year	Bournemouth	Poole
2021	3325	1121
2022	3243	487
2023	2849	517
2024	2201	797

14. The table below details BCP Bereavement Care Service gross income by financial year and by function against budget expectation. The increase in cremation income in 2024/25 over 2023/24, despite a reduction in the total number of cremations can be attributed to the individual service type and packages booked by bereaved families.

Year	Crematorium	Cemeteries	Memorials	Total Income	Budget Expectation
2020/21	£ 3,735,900	£ 562,600	£ 88,600	£ 4,387,100	£ 4,511,200
2021/22	£ 3,277,500	£ 568,500	£ 64,900	£ 3,910,900	£ 4,511,200
2022/23	£ 2,838,100	£ 457,900	£ 32,900	£ 3,328,900	£ 4,511,200
2023/24	£ 2,444,700	£ 452,400	£ 104,900	£ 3,002,000	£ 3,920,200
2024/25	£ 2,717,300	£ 668,300	£ 116,700	£ 3,502,300	£ 3,420,200
2025/26 forecast	£ 2,307,700	£ 563,800	£ 154,700	£ 3,026,200	£ 3,158,200

Options appraisal

15. The following options are available to the Council:

- a. Do nothing - The facility would continue as a ceremonial venue for bereaved families with conveyancing of the deceased to Bournemouth Crematorium for a cremation offered by BCP Bereavement Care. Bournemouth Crematorium has sufficient capacity to manage current demand.

A decision not to reinstate the cremation facility at this location will result in a level of ongoing local community and Funeral Director disappointment and dissatisfaction in the loss of an asset as evidenced through the public petition and local press articles.

- b. Direct Operation by Council – The Council's current financial position means this remains currently unviable, any investment decision at this time would result in an increase in unsupported revenue spend and impact of the Council's Medium-Term Financial Plan. The potential to increase income through achieving an ongoing increased marketplace share of customer base is not guaranteed and will be subject to open competition and impacts of changing bereavement industry trends.
- c. Concession procurement (recommended) – Formally take the site to market to invite bids to realise service reinstatement whilst remaining a BCP Council asset. It could be possible to minimise financial risk to the council whilst securing income and providing enhanced services to bereaved families whilst also improving service resilience.
- d. The Council could explore selling the facility. This option would not provide a revenue return to the Council which could be used to contribute to the MTFP, would reduce Council influence on any future design and operation of the facility and result in direct competition to remaining BCP Council Bereavement Services assets.

Next stage proposal

16. Given informal interest expressed by multiple parties it is recommended that Cabinet consider formally offering a concession opportunity to the market, inviting bids from experienced crematorium operators to:

- Enhance the BCP Bereavement Care offer to individuals and communities at their time of need.
 - Invest in necessary refurbishment and compliance upgrades.
 - Reopen and operate the cremation service.
 - Provide bereavement services aligned with industry standards and council values.
 - Pay base rent and revenue share to the council.
17. In doing so the Council can be satisfied it has explored all current interest in realising a reinvestment opportunity through a transparent procurement process. The results of the evaluation will be considered by Cabinet in a future report to determine if the offer(s) best align with Council priorities, values and MTFP requirements as part of an award decision. Contracting authorities are under no obligation to award a contract following a procurement exercise.

Summary of financial implications

18. Any successful concessionaire would be responsible for capital investment and operational costs. The council should receive base rent and a share of revenue, subject to market response.
19. Re-opening cremations at Poole will directly reduce the number of cremations at Bournemouth Crematorium. All 797 of the 2024 service bookings at Poole required a cremation and were conveyed to Bournemouth. In addition, some Bournemouth bookings which enable the service and cremation to be undertaken without conveyancing may revert back to the Poole site. It is therefore important that any concession arrangement minimises the financial impact on the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan which will be evaluated against each bid received.
20. From a VAT perspective, the concession of a crematorium could affect the Council's partial exemption position if not structured appropriately. To mitigate the risk of breaching the de-minimis threshold, all tender submissions will be carefully assessed from a tax standpoint to ensure they do not result in adverse VAT implications for the authority. Particular attention will be given to any proposed capital investment, as structural alterations beyond the replacement of cremators may constitute a barter transaction, which could further implicate the Council's VAT position.

Summary of legal implications

21. There is no statutory duty on a local authority to provide burial or cremation facilities, but if they do so, the management is governed by the Local Authorities' Cemeteries Order 1977 and the 2008 Regulations. Local authorities are defined as burial authorities and/or cremation authorities and given the power to provide services by virtue of the Local Government Act 1972.
22. Any approved procurement process will comply with Procurement Act 2023.

Summary of human resources implications

23. An individual crematorium must be certified and licenced as a stand-alone facility for the cremation and disposal of human remains in compliance with the Cremation (England and Wales) Regulations 2008. As such the site must be provided with sufficient, trained, and competent staff who must be present when active cremations are being undertaken. Staffing implications will be taken into

consideration when evaluating bids including potential for Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations (TUPE).

Summary of sustainability impact

24. Any bidder will be required, as part of their bid, to clearly describe how their operations would support the Council's Climate and Ecological Declaration ambitions.
25. An outline Decision Impact Assessment 747 has been completed and will be reviewed following evaluation of submitted bids.

Summary of public health implications

26. This report continues to support the work that Bereavement Care Services undertakes within the community in delivering a range of services, which provides the appropriate closure at a time of heightened emotional distress and supports a healthier grief recovery process.

Summary of equality implications

27. An Equalities Impact Assessment – conversation screening tool has been completed; there are no significant negative equality impacts on protected characteristics that have been identified with service users retaining access to both local authority and private sector marketplace providers delivering local and national facilities.

Summary of risk implications

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigation
Detrimental impact to Council's MTFP income	Medium/Low	Medium	Unknown until bids evaluated. Specifications to clearly define Council service needs.
Insufficient market interest	Medium	Medium	Site remains as is, cremations undertaken at Bournemouth which has sufficient capacity for existing need.
Operator fails to meet service standards	Medium	High	Include robust performance management and penalty clauses in the concession agreement.
Delays in procurement or concessionaire mobilisation	Medium	Medium	Develop a clear procurement timeline and mobilisation plan; monitor progress closely.
Public opposition or reputational risk	Low	Medium	Engage stakeholders early; ensure transparency and sensitivity in communications.

Environmental non-compliance	Low	High	Require adherence to environmental regulations and regular audits.
Financial failure of concessionaire	Low	High	Conduct financial due diligence; include step-in rights and contingency planning.

Background papers

[Poole Crematorium Report September 2023](#)

[Poole Crematorium Report March 2023](#)

[Poole Crematorium Report September 2022](#)

Appendices

None