

Report of the Deputy Chief Executive

CREMATION NUMBERS AND GENERAL UPDATE1. Purpose of report

To provide the Joint Committee with the latest update on cremation numbers and a general update including the Covid-19 response.

2. Background and Detail

At its meeting of 20 June 2019 Joint Committee noted and requested the following:

“Concern was raised that the number of cremations was lower than anticipated which created a budget shortfall. RESOLVED that a detailed report on cremation numbers ... be brought to the Joint Committee.”

	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
April	249	310	262	190	228	190	302
May	233	229	231	230	251	230	269
June	206	299	246	253	198	212	
July	236	233	213	200	178	196	
August	234	210	201	181	201	194	
September	233	219	233	198	153	175	
October	261	236	212	207	191	207	
November	268	237	255	221	221	210	
December	298	295	257	235	196	202	
January	309	261	315	298	273	272	
February	321	305	315	269	241	204	
March	323	300	263	263	217	240	
TOTAL	3171	3134	3003	2745	2548	2532	

It can be seen that Covid-19 had some impact on increased funeral numbers in March this year and a significant impact in April and May this year. This required some extended hours working and some support from other Broxtowe Borough Council services as at times some Crematorium staff were shielding or self-isolating. At the time of writing, funeral numbers for June have returned to “normal”, but numbers permitted to attend funerals are still restricted to 10. Further details are given in the appendix.

In terms of other updates:

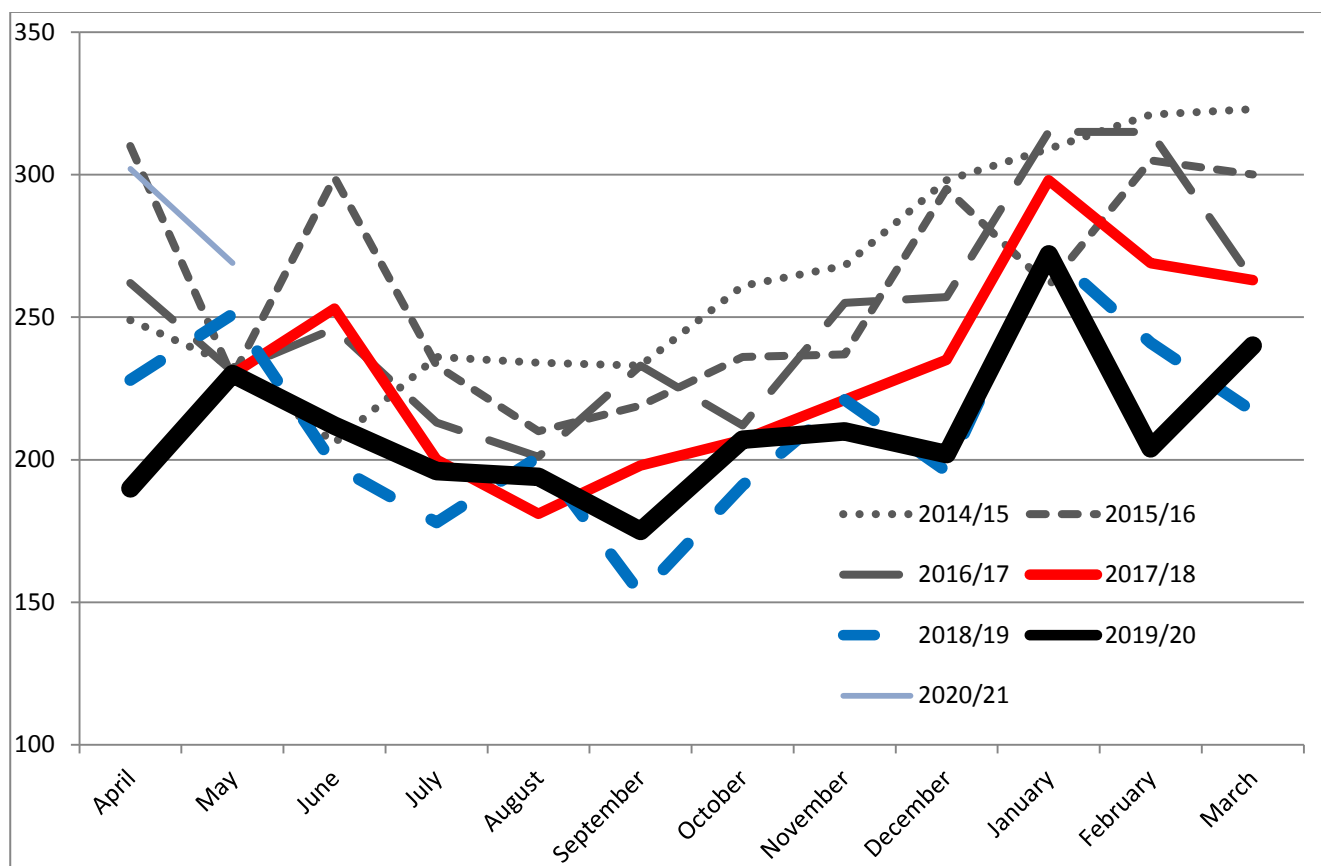
- Tenders for improved bereavement software have now been received and are being analysed – a verbal update will be provided to Committee.
- A hearth replacement was completed at the end of May.
- Some waived charges for under 18’s are now being recouped through the government’s Children’s Funeral Fund for England. Further details are given in the appendix.

Recommendation

The Joint Committee is asked to NOTE the report.

Background papers

Nil

Graph of Bramcote cremation numbers by month and financial yearEstimating numbers for the remainder of the year

It is, of course, difficult to predict cremation numbers for the rest of the year. On the one hand any resurgence in Covid-19 could lead to a significant increase again; on the other hand, the first wave had a particular focus on those with underlying health conditions – in some cases, sadly, these people may well have passed away during 2020/21 regardless of Covid-19. Regular updates will be brought to committee. Early indications are that cremation numbers are down in June.

Covid-19 pricing changes

Funeral numbers were restricted to 25 from 23rd March and then to 10 from 24th March. No change was made to the basic funeral price (£712 until 31st March, £730 from 1st April as part of the usual annual planned increase); but from 23rd March (and on-going) the cost of a live webcast was significantly reduced from £65 to £30 (cost only, no profit) and there has been significant uptake of this – 318 webcasts in total (from 23rd March to time of writing) representing 43% of the 746 funerals that took place.

There has also been a large increase in demand for direct funerals (no service) which are offered at a much reduced price (£500 before and after 31st March). However, these still only accounted for 10% of funerals at their peak in April.

There have been very few complaints suggesting a general understanding of the measures required, along with an appreciation of the options of reduced-price webcasting or direct cremation.

The loss of income from the increased take-up of direct funerals and from the elimination of the profit element of live webcasting charges, has been more than exceeded by the increase in income from the increase in funeral numbers. However, gas costs will have increased and there have also been additional staff costs (overtime and seconded staff) to help meet the demand. A fuller analysis will be provided once the crisis is over / subsided and all the relevant data is available.

General Covid-19 response

- In line with many other crematoria, funeral numbers at Bramcote were reduced to 10 (nationally the picture has varied from zero, 5, 10, 15 through to 20).
- A small temporary body storage facility was installed at Bramcote in April in case the lockdown measures did not have the desired impact and in case of any issues with the cremators (which have been working near full capacity). Fortunately, this was not needed and was removed this month.
- Bramcote staff have worked extended shifts, weekends and Bank Holidays and have been supported by staff from Broxtowe's grounds maintenance team and by a volunteer from the Council's furloughed Liberty Leisure Company.
- A number of Bramcote staff had to self-isolate at the start of the outbreak, and one member of staff remains shielded at the time of writing.
- A protective screen for chapel attendants is being installed in the larger (Serenity) chapel and, once completed, consideration will be given to raising the number of mourners allowed in chapel.
- The public and funeral directors have generally been very supportive, or at least understanding, of the extraordinary measures required during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- One incident required did require police attendance but this was associated more with disagreements between factions of the large numbers who sought to attend, rather than a disagreement with the Crematorium's rules and its staff.

Social Fund (Children's Funeral Fund for England) Regulation 2019

Committee will recall that for a number of years it has waived the standard cremation fee for under 18's, Mercifully, such funerals represent a very small proportion of funerals at Bramcote.

On the 23 July 2019, the government introduced the Social Fund (Children's Funeral Fund for England) Regulation 2019. The CFF was introduced to spare parents from, in most cases the unexpected costs of their child's funeral. This is achieved by the government establishing a grant regime so that local authorities and private sector providers can claim to recover the costs of providing children's funerals and not charging the parents for doing so. The CFF defines children as up to 18 years of age and post 24-week gestation Still-Born babies.

These costs are now being recovered from government, but due to the small numbers, the impact on income will be relatively modest. Further analysis will be provided to the next Committee.