


| SHORT REPORT | |
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| Subject Matter | REGISTRATION SERVICES (inc Burials and Cremations) |
| Lead Director | Surjit Tour Director of Law and Governance & Monitoring Officer |
| Date | 22 April 2020 |



1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY – Registration services

- 1.1 **Coroners** – the service has seen a significant increase in the number of deaths referred to the coroner in the Black Country. In response, the Area Coroner for the Black Country is now working full time in support of the Senior Coroner. Resilience has been provided by mutual aid arrangements from bereavement related services across the region. This was identified as a mitigating measure within the Service business continuity plan.
- 1.2 With the consent of the Chief Coroner, jury and other heavily attended inquests have been adjourned until social distancing measures have been relaxed. Whilst the volumes in some instances may cause a slight delay to funeral arrangements, the service is fully operational and is coping well with the increased demand. The demand is monitored daily and the Senior Coroner and Council’s Coronial Team have put in place measures to help ensure the anticipated demand can be met effectively.
- 1.3 **Register Office** – in response to new legislation and subsequent regulations associated with the Coronavirus Act 2020, it has been necessary to suspend several services provided by the Register Office team. All ceremonies have been put on hold as well as birth registrations and notices of marriage appointments. The reception area at the Register Office is also now closed to the public.
- 1.4 All available resources are now focussed on certificate production and death registration following changes that have been introduced to mitigate the impact of the coronavirus pandemic. All death registration is now completed by telephone, with death registration now also available more routinely on weekends.

- 1.5 The service is managing the increase in demand well and it is anticipated that the mitigating measures taken will help the Council to meet the anticipated increase in demand.
- 1.6 **Bereavement Services** – In a similar way, new legislation and subsequent new regulations associated with the Coronavirus Act 2020 has identified a need to adjust the level of burial and cremation related services to the public.
- 1.7 To account for social distancing advice, the numbers permitted to attend funeral services has been reduced to immediate family only (maximum of 10 persons). The layout of our crematoria chapels has been adjusted to account for social distancing measures. It has also been necessary to leave our cemeteries and crematoria closed except for when funeral services are taking place. Webcasting and recording of funeral services at our crematoria for all families is now free of charge.
- 1.8 A regional-wide protocol has been developed to ensure, so far as reasonably and practicably possible, a consistent approach is adopted. There have been discussions with funeral directors to ensure they do all they can to support families, reinforce the protocol and facilitate timely burials and cremations.
- 1.9 Some discretionary services have been suspended, to include memorial appointments, witnessing scattering of ashes and catering for wakes. Reception and waiting areas have been closed. The service has seen an increase in demand for burials and cremations, therefore more slots are now being made available to mitigate any unnecessary delays with funeral arrangements. Services continue to be provided seven days a week. The service has recruited former employees who have recently retired which has also been complemented by staff from other council services to ensure our cemeteries and crematoria continue to be accessible safely for funeral services.
- 1.10 The Council is the lead authority for delivering the Additional Storage Facility at Birmingham International Airport on behalf West Midland and Warwickshire Councils. Completion of the Additional Storage Facility at Birmingham Airport is a priority as it must be operational by 17 April 2020.

2. KEY ISSUES

- 2.1 The Additional Storage Facility at Birmingham Airport is a huge undertaking with considerable challenges that is being delivered at significant pace. Considerable effort has been expended by the Council in meeting this challenge and has placed increased pressures on officers.

2.2 The anticipated increase in deaths remains difficult to predict. Registration Services monitor the situation carefully and has taken effective mitigation measures to ensure it can maintain the necessary services required.

3. NEXT STEPS

3.1 To prioritise delivery of the Additional Storage Facility at Birmingham Airport.

3.2 Continue with engagement with funeral directors and other stakeholders to manage demand and emerging issues.

3.3 Scale up operations to meet actual and anticipate demand.