

For Publication

Impact of Covid-19 Update

Meeting: Chesterfield and District Joint Crematorium
Committee

Date: 13 December 2021

Report by: Bereavement Services Manager

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1.0 Purpose of Report

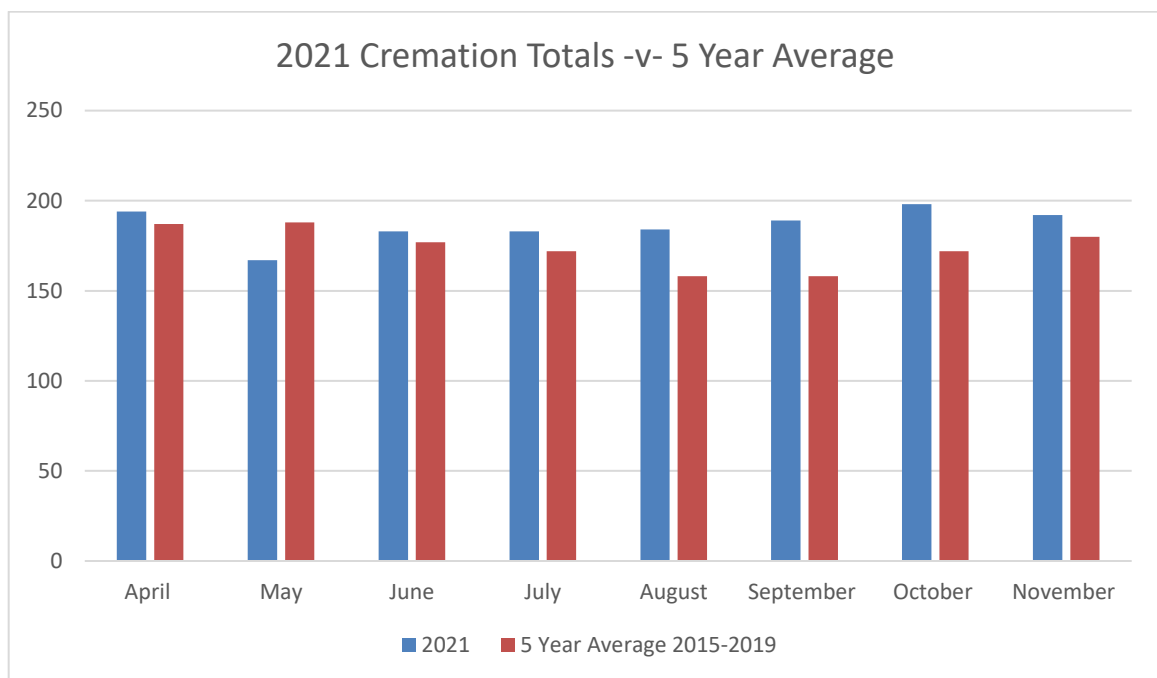
Reports have been presented to the Committee at each meeting since June 2020 on the Impact of Covid-19 and the response from Chesterfield and District Joint Crematorium.

This report will update and inform Members on the current position with any key updates since the last meeting of the Committee.

2.0 Excess Cremation Services from April 2021

From 1st April 2021 to 30 November 2021, 1490 cremation services had taken place. The 5 year average for the same period from 2015 to 2019 was 1392.

The table below shows the number of cremations by month in 2021 (in blue) compared to the 5 year average (in red).



In summary, Members will note that during the 8 months from April to November 2021, 98 excess cremations took place (a 7% increase) -v- the 5 year average.

Recent data from the Office of National Statistics showed around 21,000 excess deaths from July to 5 November 2021. Around 11,500 excess deaths involved Covid whilst a little more than 9,000 were due to other causes such as dementia, heart and lung disease and Cancer with more people sadly dying at home.

The closure of a nearby Crematorium, for maintenance and improvements, has also seen a noticeable increase in cremation services for residents of nearby areas.

3.0 Current Government Guidance

Members will recall from the September 2021 meeting when the Manager reported that most restrictions on funeral events were

removed as the Government proceeded to Step 4 of the roadmap out of lockdown in England from July 2021 onwards.

A link to the Governments latest Guidance, updated on 23rd November 2021, can be found below

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-managing-a-funeral-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic>

4.0 **Funeral Services and Chapel**

The Manager reported a return to a near normal services resuming following the lifting of restrictions. For information, Members will note that currently;

- Chapel Capacity remains at 100 mourners. Seating rows spaced at 1.1m intervals using the full length of Chapel with no standing room available.
- The Waiting Room, with overspill facility, including screen and speakers is open with 18 seated capacity.
- Outside speakers remain in operation for those who do not feel comfortable to enter a crowded space or if capacity is reached.
- The Public Toilets and Book of Remembrance Room remain open at the weekends with a member of staff on site.
- Services are currently running at the usual 40 minute interval.
- Chapel Attendants continue to disinfect touch points and seating on a regular basis throughout the day.
- Hand sanitiser remains in place on entrance to public areas.
- Signage remains in place encouraging mourners to wear face coverings, sanitise hands and use the Covid App.
- Risk Assessments remain in place for staff to continue with caution. The latest risk assessment includes working from home where possible, instructs staff to continue wearing a face covering whilst moving around buildings, continue with good hygiene/hand washing/cleaning equipment and

continue to maintain social distancing wherever possible (including staggered breaks, leaving chapel once services commence, and no sharing of maintenance vehicles).

5.0 **Staffing – Positive Cases and Isolation**

Since the beginning of the Pandemic, three members of staff have tested positive for Covid-19. After investigation it was concluded that none of the three staff contracted the virus at work.

There have been a further 12 isolations due to close contact with someone who has tested positive since the beginning of the Pandemic.

Although support was available from the Lead Authority, each case was manageable due to the flexibility and multi skilled nature of the Team.

Several staff, seconded from the Lead Authority during the first wave of the pandemic, have returned for refresher training.

6.0 **Winter 2021/2022**

The impact of the Covid Pandemic on the service during the Winter months is somewhat unknown at the time of writing in particular whether the Omicron variant could trigger a surge in infections.

Earlier in the report, the Manager reported excess deaths from a range of illnesses as well as Covid 19 and the Crematorium that has temporarily closed will not re-open until March 2022 at the earliest. With this in mind, it is recommended that Members give approval for the Manager to activate a range of measures at their discretion following on from the experience gained so far and using all available data to hand.

Those measures may include, but are not limited to;

- Recall of Seconded Staff from the Lead Authority
- Recall of Additional Building Cleaning Support
- Activation of Webcasting, Free of Charge for the Bereaved
- Limit on numbers allowed to attend (in line with Government Guidance)
- Additional order of spares and consumables
- Closure of buildings at the weekend when services are not in progress (in line with Government Guidance)

6.0 **Recommendations**

6.1 That the report is noted.

6.2 That Members give delegated authority for the Manager to re-activate any one of a range of measures at their discretion in response to immediate pressures from the Covid-19 Pandemic.

7.0 **Reason for Recommendation**

7.1 To inform members on the current situation at the Crematorium.

To continue to provide services in a Covid Secure manner, with reverence and dignity whilst reducing funeral waiting times as far as practicable, should the need arise.

Ross Fawbert
Bereavement Services Manager