

Bereavement Services Update

Culture & Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Commission

Date of meeting: 22/01/2026

Lead director: Sean Atterbury, Director of Neighbourhood
& Environmental Services

Useful information

- Ward(s) affected: All
- Report author: Alan Brown (Bereavement Services Manager)
- Author contact details: alan.brown@leicester.gov.uk
- Report version number: 2.0

1. Summary

1.1 This report provides an update on matters related to the council's Bereavement Services, including;

- Demand for burials and cremations
- Planned improvement works at Gilroes Cemetery
- Future burial space
- Gilroes Crematorium
- Law Commission review of Burial, Cremation and New Funerary Methods legislation

2. Recommendation(s) to scrutiny:

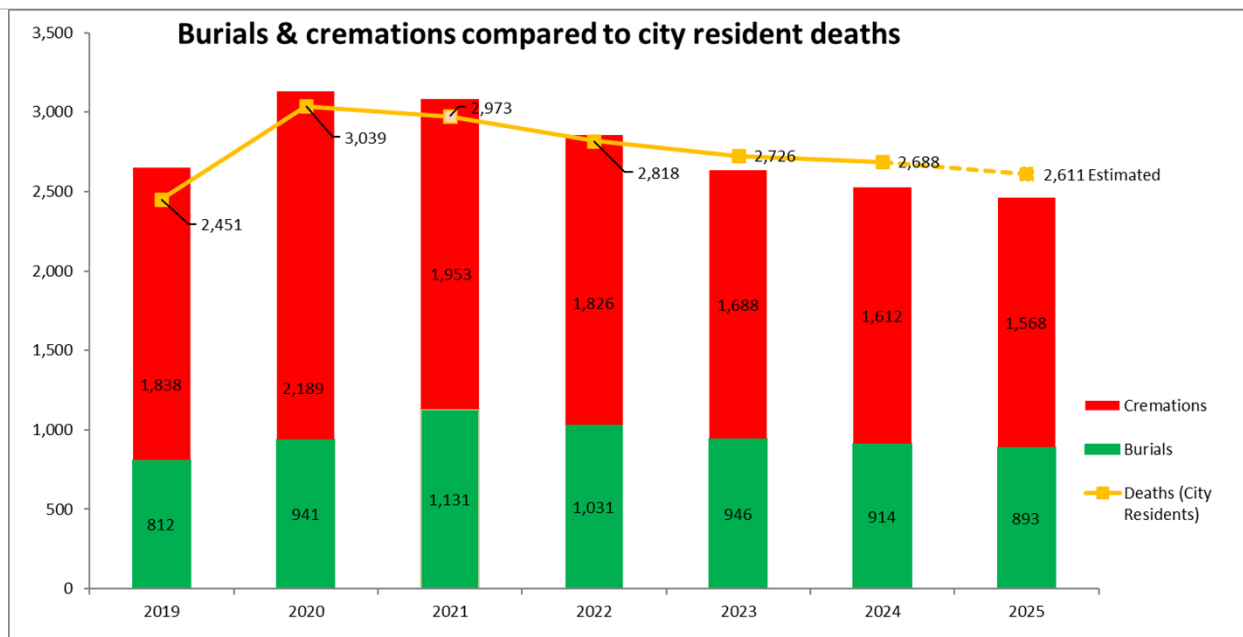
2.1 Culture & Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Commission are invited to:

- note the contents of the report for information
- comment on the report and ongoing work of Bereavement Services

3. Detailed report

Background

1. The council owns four cemeteries (Belgrave, Gilroes, Saffron Hill & Welford Road) and one crematorium (Gilroes). The council is also responsible for the maintenance and memorial safety of twelve closed churchyards in the city.
2. Providing cemeteries and crematoria are discretionary powers granted to local authorities and there is no statutory duty on the council to operate either.
3. In 2025 the council conducted 893 burials and 1,568 cremations.
4. The number of burials and cremations conducted by the council have both reduced in the last five years, following a peak in deaths during the Covid pandemic.
5. The reduction in cremation numbers is also partially attributed to the increase in private sector provision, and changing funeral preferences, leading to a rapid increase in direct cremations (a cremation without a funeral service) and the growth of national cremation providers.



Gilroes Cemetery improvements

6. Planning permission (20242077) has been granted to carry out alterations to landscaping and drainage in parts of Gilroes Cemetery. The general site plan is attached as Appendix 1.
7. Improvements to cemetery drainage will be undertaken to enhance drainage capacity. This follows on from previous capital works in 2023 which successfully mitigated waterlogging and flooding issues in parts of the cemetery.
8. Works will also include the construction of a new roadway to improve internal traffic circulation for funerals and cemetery visitors, 19 new parking bays to stop parking on grass and across graves, landscaping enhancements with the planting of 26 new trees, new native hedgerow and enhancements to grasslands to be sown with a mix of native wildflowers and grasses.
9. LCC Estates & Buildings capital projects team completed a competitive tendering procurement exercise (PAN3266) for the improvement works, with the contract awarded to Ground Control Ltd an experienced contractor who have delivered a wide range of sensitive, landscape-led schemes in operational cemeteries and crematoria.
10. Works onsite will commence in early March 2026 with completion mid-July 2026. Tree planting will be completed in Autumn/Winter 2026.
11. The management of funerals, traffic and cemetery visitors will be managed carefully throughout the construction period to ensure minimal disruption to funeral services and visitors.

Future burial space

12. The council has approximately 2,700 new graves available at Gilroes and Saffron Hill Cemeteries with an average requirement for up to 500 new graves a year. This is equivalent to 5-5½ years of new burial space meaning the current cemeteries will

reach capacity around 2030/31, subject to any potential changes in legislation that may arise from a Law Commission review to increase cemetery sustainability.

13. The Law Commission (see paragraphs 32-35) may recommend granting discretionary powers to all local authorities to reuse graves. This could potentially provide thousands of additional graves and extend the burial capacity of all cemeteries, including the provision of more than 2,000 'new' graves at Welford Road Cemetery.
14. There are currently no new graves available at Belgrave or Welford Road Cemeteries, although a small number of burials take place each year in existing graves where space permits. It should be noted that around half of all burials each year take place in an existing grave alongside other burials. These burials continue for many years after a cemetery reaches capacity to provide new graves.
15. Burial is the only permitted funeral option for Muslims. The Muslim Burial Council of Leicestershire (MBCOL) have commissioned cemetery consultants to carry out a cemetery feasibility and site search to identify potential sites to establish a new Muslim cemetery within 5 miles of Leicester. The council and MBCOL will continue to share information and work together with regards future burial needs.
16. Due to limited land holdings, and tight geographical boundaries, there is a lack of suitable land available in the city for a new cemetery. City council owned land outside the city boundary has been appraised as unsuitable for future cemetery use.
17. Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) may see the council's boundary expand which could offer alternative opportunities for future burial space. A desktop review based on the council's current LGR proposal has identified other existing council cemeteries and private burial grounds within an extended city boundary. Should this go ahead, further work will be needed with the relevant burial authorities to identify their current burial space availability, annual burial rates, whether they have already identified any land for future burial use and cemetery management practices, to develop a single strategic burial space strategy.
18. We await the decision on LGR due in 2026 for consideration of any implications arising from the Government's decision. It is recommended that a future report on the impact of LGR on bereavement services be drafted once the position becomes clearer.

Gilroes Crematorium

19. The Deputy City Mayor and council officers met with members of the Hindu, Jain & Sikh Crematorium Network (HJSCN) in October 2025 to discuss potential improvements to Gilroes Crematorium to support funeral services from the respective communities. A follow up meeting is scheduled for February 2026.
20. HJSCN have requested the provision of a dedicated puja facility to give bereaved families the ability to hold open coffin prayer rituals before the main funeral service.
21. Families already have access to the crematorium chapels to hold pre-cremation puja services by booking extended chapel time, however the HJSCN would prefer a dedicated facility or a more intimate space for smaller gatherings. While there are space constraints that prevent a dedicated puja room at Gilroes Crematorium, we are exploring the possibility of adapting the chapel side rooms to accommodate this

practice alongside the current provision in the main chapels. This will require completion of some building surveys and capital investment which are currently being costed.

22. Further consultation with other crematorium users and funeral directors will take place before any changes are implemented as the rooms are used by all funeral services at the crematorium.
23. There is alternative local private sector provision for Hindu, Jain and Sikh cremation services at Great Glen Crematorium where this is a purpose-built Puja Hall.

Crematorium emissions

24. DEFRA have issued new technical guidance for crematoria which is designed to further reduce the environmental impact of cremations. The revised guidelines have introduced a new requirement to monitor and control emissions of Nitrogen Oxides (NOx), mainly Nitric Oxide (NO) and Nitrogen Dioxide (NO₂), which are released during combustion processes.
25. Gilroes Crematorium must be compliant with the new emissions level by December 2029. To ensure compliance by the deadline, NOx emissions will be monitored during annual emissions tests in 2026 & 2027 (independently verified) to set the baseline levels and inform the type of NOx abatement required. Capital investment for abatement installation in 2028/29 will be required.
26. The costs to retrospectively fit NOx abatement to the cremators at Gilroes Crematorium is estimated at £100,000 for a simple dosing solution, plus an ongoing cost of £3 to £4 per cremation for the supply of reagent.

Gilroes Cemetery & Crematorium marketing

27. Bereavement Services will be enhancing the marketing of Gilroes Crematorium during 2026 to ensure bereaved families are fully aware of the services available.
28. Fees and charges for cremations, and burials, are benchmarked annually to ensure the council's pricing structure remains competitive with comparable providers.
29. A new council website is in development and expected to go-live in early 2026 and this will feature information about bereavement services and Gilroes to promote the facilities and services on offer.
30. The council's communications and marketing team have designed a new poster and leaflets to promote Gilroes. These are to be distributed to local funeral directors, Registration offices and local hospital and hospice bereavement teams to display at suitable locations for bereaved families.
31. An open day will take place in the summer of 2026 to further promote Gilroes Cemetery and Crematorium and showcase the completion of the improvement works in the cemetery. The Open Day will also give members of the public the opportunity to take a tour of the crematorium and learn more about bereavement services.

Law Commission review of burial, cremation and new funerary methods legislation

32. Scrutiny members have previously requested updates on the progress of the Law Commission review. The Law Commission is seeking to reform the law of burial and cremation in England and Wales which is piecemeal, complex and outdated.
33. The first phase of the Law Commission's review involved a public consultation (October 2024 - January 2025) and looked at legislation related to burials and cremations. This phase of consultation considered extending discretionary powers to all local authorities to extinguish old burial rights and permit the reuse of graves by deepening graves to allow further burials. The powers are already available in limited form to London Local Authorities, a small number of private cemeteries and a single town council (Bishops Stortford). The Law Commission have indicated that the report and recommendations from this consultation will be published in early 2026, however legislation changes are linked to the completion of Phase 3 Rights & Obligations so are not expected until 2028.
34. The second phase of the Law Commission's review also involved a public consultation (June 2025 – September 2025) and looked at new funerary methods, including alkaline hydrolysis and human composting, and the need for a regulatory framework for these and other emerging funerary methods. The Law Commission have indicated that the report and a draft legislative Bill will be published in Spring 2026.
35. The third phase of the Law Commission's review will begin in early 2026 (TBC) and finish in 2027. This will look at legal rights and obligations relating to funerary methods, funerals and remains.

4. Financial, legal, equalities, climate emergency and other implications

4.1 Financial Implications

Any proposals for future cemetery capacity will need consideration as and when they are brought forward, reflecting the long-term financial commitment which comes with such sites. Options for the NOx abatement work will need developing and any capital requirement arising as a result will be considered within future capital budget setting.

Signed: Stuart McAvoy – Head of Finance

Dated: 14th January 2026

4.2 Legal Implications

Various improvement works are being undertaken and to be further undertaken by Bereavement Services primarily in relation to ease of access rights, increases in capacity, facilities and aesthetics of the surroundings for these important services to the various communities in the Leicester area. This covers the competitive tendering exercise to seek the improvements and obtain value for money for the Council in accordance with the new Procurement Act 2023. Any contract award(s) must also comply with internal Contract Procedure Rules and require notice publication by the Council's Procurement team.

Ongoing consultations including the various phases of the Law Commission Review recommendations, advisory notes and subsequent law changes will require compliance and implementation. This may require further adaptations or enhancements to meet changes imposed and/or arising out of Local Government Reorganisation including expansion of boundaries as identified above.

Signed: S Lowry-Smith Steven Lowry-Smith - Contracts & Procurement Solicitor

Dated: 14 January 2026

4.3 Equalities Implications

Under the Equality Act 2010, the Council has a Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations. This report provides an update on matters related to the council's Bereavement Services. This duty is particularly relevant to Bereavement Services, where provision must meet the diverse needs of Leicester's multi-faith and multicultural population. The Council is proactively managing pressures on bereavement services through targeted collaboration and infrastructure improvements. While the projected exhaustion of local burial space by 2030/31 poses a challenge for the Muslim community—for whom burial is a religious necessity—the Council is working closely with the Muslim Burial Council of Leicestershire to investigate land expansion and secure future provision. Engagement with the Hindu, Jain, and Sikh communities is facilitating the development of "puja" facilities and open-coffin ritual spaces, ensuring that these cultural requirements are met with dignity and respect. The planned improvements at Gilroes Cemetery should provide benefits for elderly visitors and those with mobility-related disabilities.

The proposed service updates and the strategic response to the Law Commission review aim to create a more sustainable and inclusive service. The potential Law Commission recommendation to allow the reuse of old graves may be sensitive for certain religious or non-religious groups. If granted these powers, the Council must collaborate with local communities to ensure that grave reuse policies respect different religious views.

Signed: Equalities Officer, Surinder Singh, Ext 37 4148

Dated: 9 January 2026

4.4 Climate Emergency Implications

It should be noted that positive steps are being taken to manage and to some extent mitigate the carbon impact of cremations and burials.

Service delivery by the council and partners generally contributes to the council's carbon footprint so any potential impacts could be considered within delivery of related projects, such as encouraging the use of sustainable travel options, using buildings and materials efficiently and adopting updated practices that could help reduce the carbon emissions associated with bereavement services.

Gilroes crematorium is in the top 10% of the Council's operational estate for gas and electricity consumption and it is important that, as new laws are introduced and new methods of burial and cremation are considered, the associated energy consumption and environmental impact of these is assessed on a case-by-case basis to optimise the use of energy, and mitigate environmental pollution.

Signed: Phil Ball, Sustainability Officer, ext 372246

Dated: 13th January 2026

4.5 Other Implications

None

Signed:

Dated:

5. Background information and other papers:

N/A

6. Summary of appendices:

- Appendix 1: Gilroes Cemetery improvement plan

