

**BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF REGULATION & ENFORCEMENT TO THE
HOUSING AND NEIGHBOURHOODS OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

UPDATE ON DELAYS IN BIRTHS AND DEATHS REGISTRATIONS

Updates on the previous actions are as follows:

1. Development of Muslim Burial Section – Quinton Cemetery

- 1.1 The new Muslim burial section that was opened in Quinton Cemetery in September 2022 provides a wider choice of locations for burials in the South of the city. To date there have been 41 Muslim burials in Quinton Cemetery. The services are available at a minimum of four hours' notice and the bookings will be accepted as soon as the appointment to register the death is confirmed. Burials are available Monday to Friday, up to 3pm in the Winter months and 3:30pm during the Summer.

2. Evening Burials

- 2.1 Sutton New Hall Cemetery provides a burial service that is available at a minimum of three hours' notice, seven days a week (except Christmas Day). A funeral booking is now accepted as soon as the family have confirmation that a registration of death appointment is arranged, rather than when the Registrar's Certificate is issued, which further reduces waiting times for families.
- 2.2 Since the introduction in the winter of 2022, floodlit burials take place up to 6pm even through the winter months, which has improved the services' response to requests for short notice burials during this period.
- 2.3 There are approximately 800 Muslim burials carried out at Sutton New Hall Cemetery each year, most at short notice. Of those, less than 1% take place more than one day from booking due to a lack of available service times.

3. Investment in IT telephony

- 3.1 In the Summer of 2022, Bereavement Services, working in partnership with the Contact Centre team, introduced a 'one number' telephony system, enabling callers to select the reason for their call so that it could be directed to the appropriate office. There were initial problems but, following a redesign of the caller menu options and which teams the calls were directed to, the telephony has since improved and the feedback from Funeral Directors has been more positive.
- 3.2 The service has also introduced a single e-mail address, where enquiries are directed to the relevant offices, based upon the e-mail content.

4. Working with communities

- 4.1 Work continues with the engagement across community groups and Friends of Cemeteries groups. Regular meetings take place and there are various activities that are supported by the service. The community activities have reduced in recent months as Bereavement Services no

longer has an Activities Manager due to the completion of the Jewellery Quarter Restoration Project and the cessation of the project funding.

5. Registration Services

- 5.1 Recruitment to the vacancies within the Register Office is ongoing. There are more trained Registrars and Deputy Registrars than at the point of the previous report. Along with a planned programme of additional hours' working and some later opening times during the week, this has increased the availability for birth and death registrations.
- 5.2 Where families or Funeral Directors advise the service of a requirement for an urgent registration for faith or another reason then, upon the receipt of the required documents to enable the registration to be completed, appointments are generally available either the same or following day.
- 5.3 The Birmingham Register Office completes around 20,000 birth registrations each year. There has been a significant improvement in the backlog of birth registrations. At the point that the service reintroduced these after the suspension during the Covid 19 Pandemic, there was a backlog of 6,000 birth registrations over 42 days following birth. In May 2023, the backlog had been reduced to around 2,000 birth registrations over 42 days of birth and in December this had further reduced to under 1,000 birth registrations outstanding that were over 42 days after the birth.
- 5.4 The service aims to be registering 95% of birth registrations within 42 days of birth by the end of the third quarter of 2024. The statutory target is 98% of births registered within 42 days of birth, however there will always be circumstances where families are either unavailable or choose not to register within 42 days. We will monitor our performance and take steps to increase the target if it is achievable. The performance of the Birmingham Register Office is monitored by the national General Register Office and we provide data to them and meet regularly for compliance meetings and to discuss service improvements.
- 5.5 In December 2023 the percentage of deaths being registered within 5 days of death was 23%. The major reason for this delay in the next kin receiving the Medical Certificate Cause of Death (MCCD), without which the death cannot be registered. This national problem which has been exacerbated by the introduction of a Medical Examiner for community deaths. Birmingham has pilot area for this from 2023 while this is planned to be rolled out nationally from April 2024. The General Register Office is currently looking at changing the statutory KPI to 5 days within receipt of the MCCD.

6. Update on Projects – Bereavement Services

- 6.1 Cremator replacement programme Yardley Crematorium – In April 2023, Yardley Crematorium closed to enable the existing three cremators to be replaced with two modern bariatric cremators, fridges to enable coffins to be held over to provide more efficient usage of gas and the installation of mercury abatement equipment, providing cleaner emissions to air.

- 6.2 The crematorium chapel also underwent refurbishment, and the catafalque was widened to also accept larger coffins. Full services resumed in January 2024 and the feedback from service users has been very positive.
- 6.3 Extension of Kings Norton Cemetery – This project is ongoing but has been delayed due to the findings of the ecological and habitat scoping surveys that were completed in the Autumn 2023. The findings support that the site potentially has habitats of bats, badgers, Greater Crested Newts and Grass Snakes. The proposed road layout has been changed which enables more land to be utilised to develop an additional 100 new graves spaces, extending the availability within the existing cemetery.