

**Bath and North East Somerset Council
Bereavement Services
Annual Report 2020 -2021**



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Bereavement Services

Annual Report

2020 - 2021

Introduction

Bereavement Services is a key service provider within the Council's portfolio. It provides a life event service like no other, often in a highly charged emotional context for the bereaved. This can be very challenging to everyone concerned, not least the staff who deliver this service all year round.

Services such as this are an at need service and many factors do affect the numbers of funerals that they receive, some of these are out of the control of the service providers, such as the national death rate.

The service has a number of Health and safety challenges found only in this industry.

This report looks at what Bereavement Services do; how it is performing in the market place; and what has been achieved over the financial year.

Background

The Bereavement Service carries out all funerals that are performed under the Public Health Act (Control of diseases) 1984. This means where a person dies within the geographical boundary of Bath and North East Somerset Council, and there is no one willing or able to take on the responsibility to arrange a funeral, the Coroner will pass this responsibility onto the Local Council. When this happens, members of this team will enter the deceased's property and try to find next of kin, Wills or recover monies to pay for the funeral so the Council does not bear this cost, if no funds are located the Bereavement Service is responsible for the total costs.

Many of the properties and circumstances of these cases are very traumatic and does cause stress, anxiety and upset to those officers involved in these cases, and some of the cases are of high complexity which can take a great deal of officers time.

The Council's bereavement services team discharges this duty through the operation of 1 crematorium, 2 open cemeteries and 33 closed cemeteries (sites with no unused grave spaces).

The main customer of Bereavement Services are funeral directors however residents can purchase grave plots and cremated remains memorials directly from us.

Bereavement Services is responsible for all administration of the management and operation of Harptree Cemetery, Haycombe Cemetery and Crematorium and the Council's own closed cemeteries.

The team of fifteen comprises a manager; one part-time cemetery supervisor; a crematorium supervisor; three full-time and one part-time information officers (working in reception); three crematorium technicians two of which have grounds maintenance duties which are rota'd two weeks on. All three technicians take it in turn for chapel and crematory duties.

As of June 2019 the grounds and grave digging work is carried out by the internal workforce to the bereavement service, this consists of one Supervisor, one Team Leader and three Gardeners/Groundsmen. A rolling programme of memorial inspections is includes grounds maintenance at Haycombe but all grave digging across other Council owned Cemetery Sites.

Standard office opening hours are 09:00-12.30 & 13.30-16:00 however the last cremation slot of the day starts at 16:45. The last cremation time is priced at a premium to cover overtime costs incurred, as the cremations themselves can take place late in to the evening on occasions. Services are held on request on a Saturday, for which overtime costs are incurred.

As from 1ST April 2019 we have introduced one unattended cremation slot at 8.30am Monday to Friday this is to address funeral poverty, it also gives further choice to the bereaved for a low cost option. This is only available one instance per day.

Covid 19 has had a significant impact on most industries, and Bereavement Services is no exception.

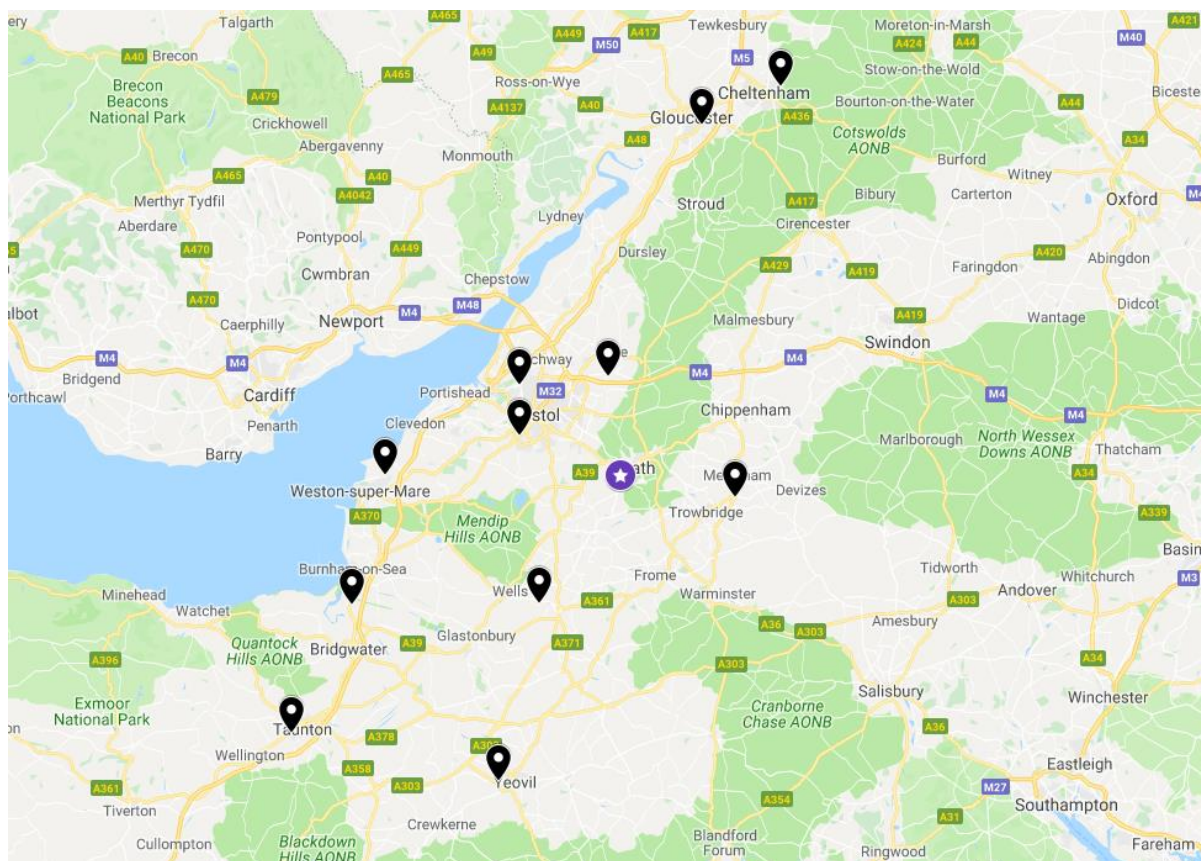
The Government introduced regulations on the number of people able to attend a funeral and, congregate in a chapel etc.

For the first time in living memory, people had to rethink the way in which they grieved. This has also meant that there has been a reduction in the number of memorials that have been sold, as people made alternative arrangements. It is likely that there will be an increased demand in the year 2021/22 following a lifting of restrictions.

On a more positive note the improvement of technology allowed us to bring in a new audio system that is more responsive to the customer's needs, and facilitates live webcasting and the ability to show words and images to accompany the service.

The competition

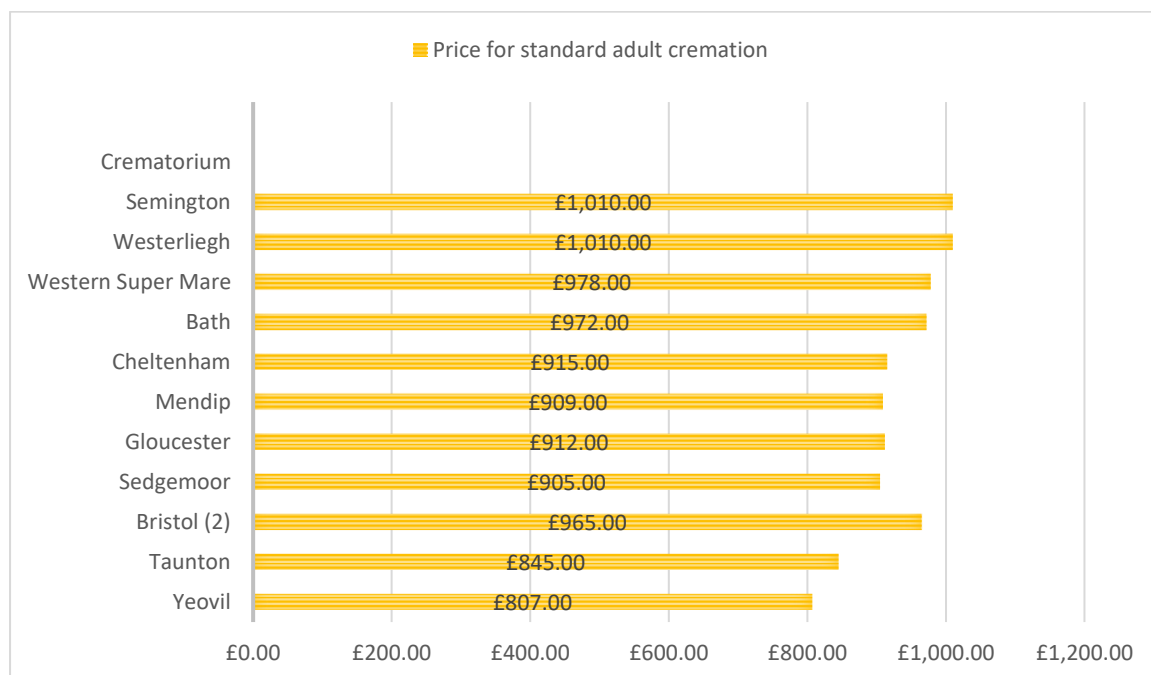
- Haycombe Cemetery and Crematorium is in close proximity to 11 neighbouring crematorium.
- Five of these are operated by the private sector.
- All are within 90 minutes travelling time of Haycombe.



Fees and Charges, Cremation.

Bath crematorium sits fourth most expensive for standard adult cremation, across eleven of the most local Crematoria. Some of these facilities are modern but many have had substantial investment into them in recent times. Haycombe has had small investments to improve the standard of the facility itself.

A criticism of this service is that we do charge a high fee but little has been done to enhance the service in comparison to other local offerings.

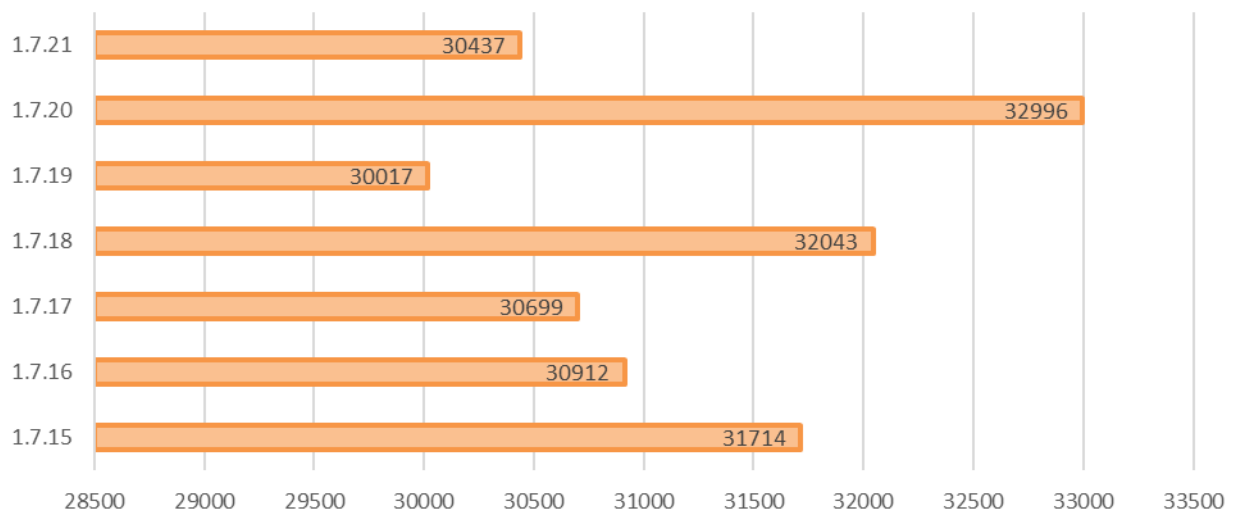


Crematorium	Ownership	Opened	Known investment last 8 years
Bath	Local Authority	1961	£70,000
Bristol (2)	Local Authority	1957/1971	Unknown
Westerliegh	Westerliegh, Private	1992	New wake/café facilities
Mendip	Dignity , Private	2011	Unknown
Semington	Westerliegh, Private	1996	New family rooms
Western SM	Dignity, Private	1966	£2.5 million
Sedgemoor	Westerliegh, Private	2013	Unknown
Cheltenham	Local Authority	1938/2018	£8.5 million
Gloucester	Local Authority	1953	£2 million
Yeovil	Local Authority	1971	£1.3 million
Taunton	Local Authority	1963	£650,000

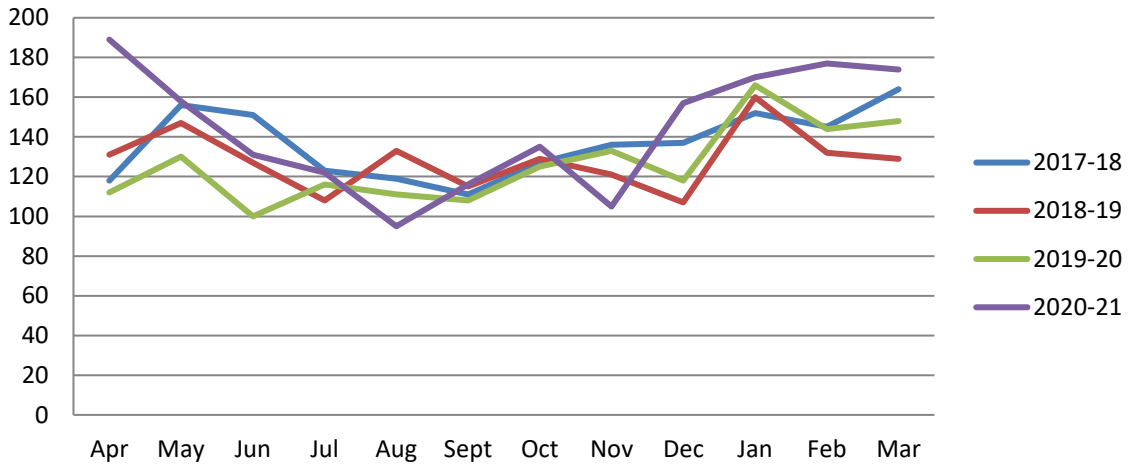
The crematorium

- Haycombe carried out 1639 cremations in 2017-18 this number increased to 1729 in 2020-2021 of which 240 were classed as COVID 19 related
- Cremations grew by 0.05% in 2020-2021
- The last five years has seen cremations at Haycombe increased from 1572 per year to 1729 (up 13%) but without the COVID19 deaths this figure would have been 1487 showing a drop 0.05%
- The office of national statistics shows 32,996 deaths for the first 6 months of 2020 this figure then dropped in 2021 to 30,437.
- There are 20 crematoria within the south west region, dividing the reduced death rate 2559 by the total number of crematoria would mean each crematorium would see a reduction of 127 cremations in that year. Haycombe did not follow trend with an increase of 90 cremations. Please note these results are affected by COVID death rates

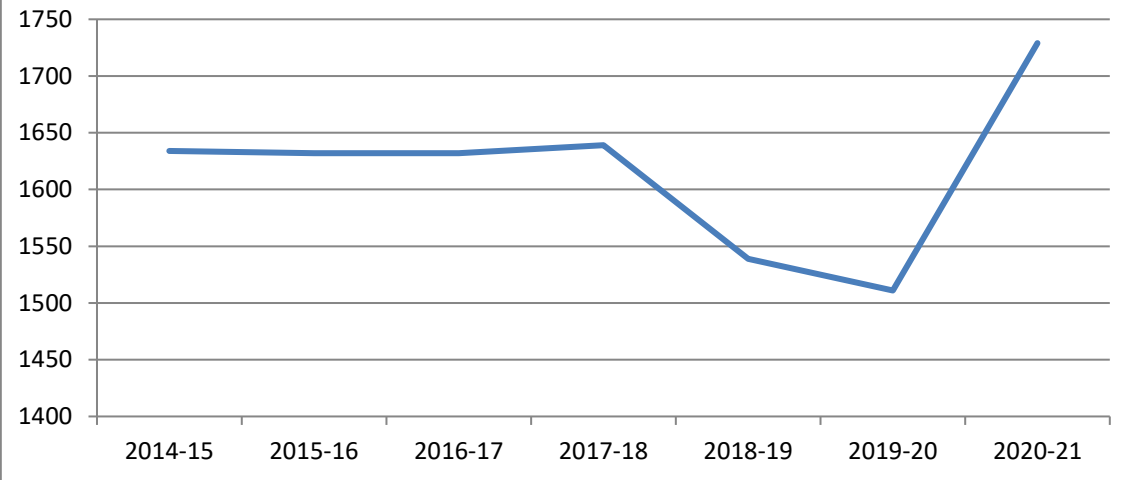
Total death registered - South West region
Period Jan - June



Haycombe Cremations



Haycombe cremations last 7 years



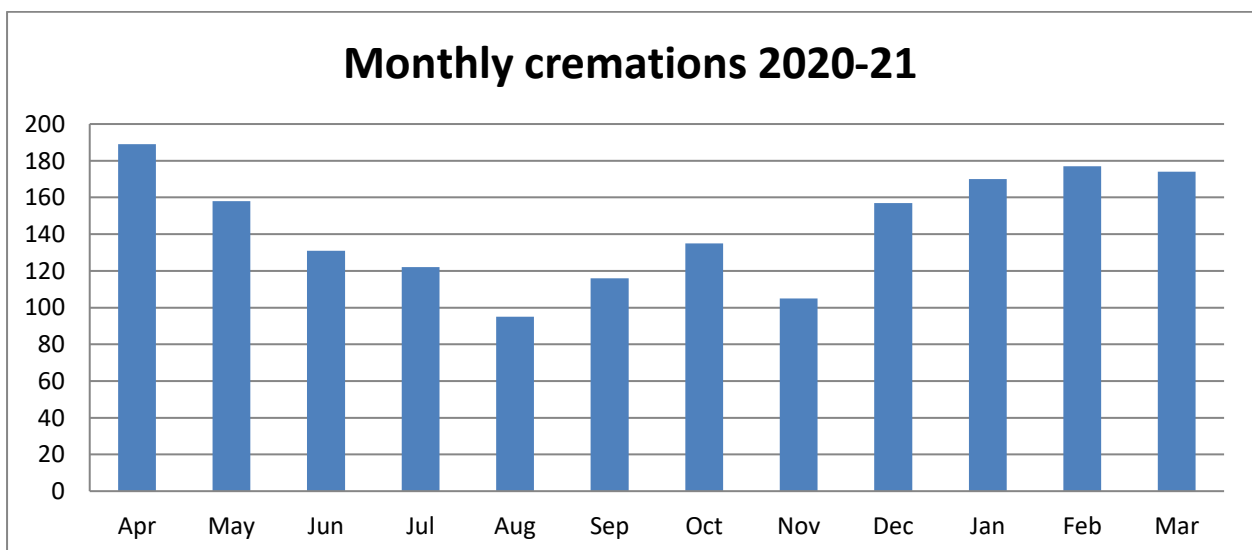
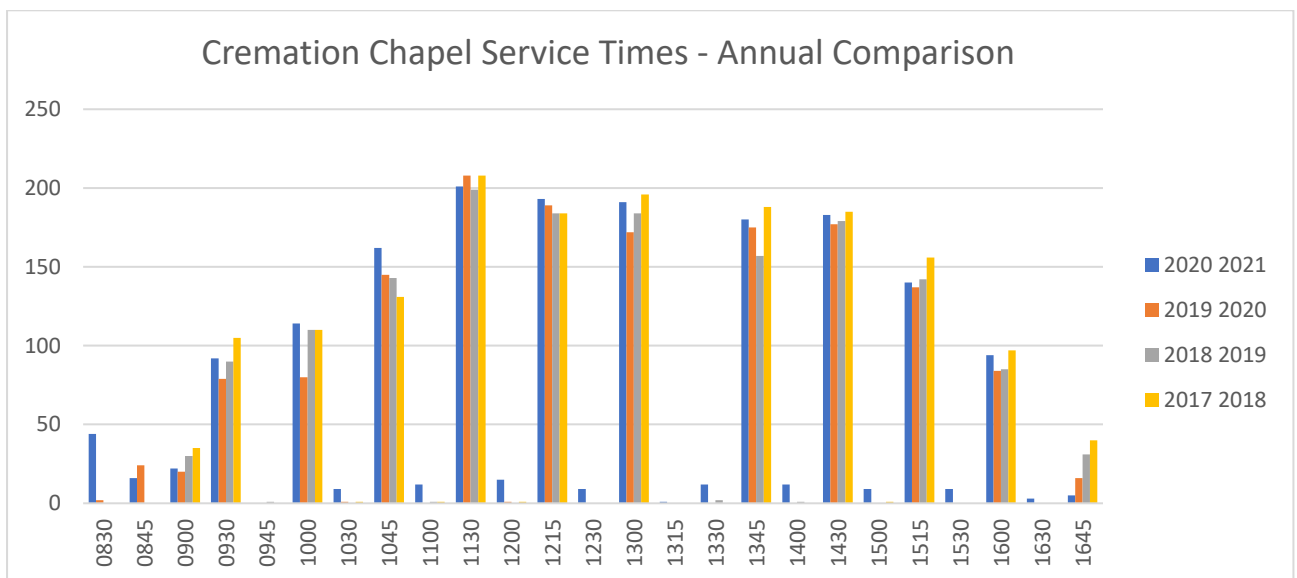
The memorials

Memorial Sales to 07/21 – challenges and successes

Memorial	Price to customer (£) (From)	Sales Apr 2020 – Mar 2021	Sales Apr 2021 – Jul 2021	Notes
Englishcombe New Memorials	1407.00	24	16	Garden closing, less interest nearer the hedge row (lose view)
Valley View New Memorials	1407.00	24	21	Open/plans to extend. Needs some design
Circle Gardens	760.00	5	5	Only 1 left
Sanctums Double	1583.00	6	4	Empty plots – long waiting times for delivery
Sanctum Quad	3166.00	0	0	None sold
Coppice	760.00	7	2	Trees recently released 15+ available. Mapping needs to be improved
Kerb Plaques Shrubbery 31	318.00	6	2	Needed as no other memorial available. Sales to hopefully increase when second interments are requested.
Kerb Plaques Shrubbery 32	318.00	17	12	Selling well
Shrubbery Plaques (1-28)	245.00	51	18	No other memorial available in older shrubberies.
Meadow Tower	240.00	7	5	Sells well when meadow in bloom
Glade Tower	240.00	0	2	Needs signage
Glade Mushrooms	240.00	0	1	Needs signage
Willow Tree - Grassland	126.00	6	3	Signage to explain the memorial is for someone scattered on Grassland
Memory Tree - BoR Room	126.00	1	1	Needs marketing -BOR room was closed for 12+ months
Book of Remembrance	122.00	72	21	Continues to sell well
Granite Bench - Backed	1273.00	10	3	Customers need to see where benches can be located
Granite Bench - Backless	1061.00	2	1	As above
Eco Bench	929.00	1	2	As above
Memorial Tree	659.00	2	1	Needs better mapping
Remembrance Wall Plaques	282.00	9	2	Now using outside toilet wall
Ashes into Glass	125.00	6	2	We do not capture sales until after cremation. We lose customers to FD

The service

- Our busiest cremation service times are between 11:30am and 14:30pm.
- The 08.45 slot is an unattended simple provision for which the deceased is brought into our care without any funeral service or family in attendance.
- The 09:00am and 09:30am services are allowed a maximum of 30 minutes.
- The booking times from 10.00am until 4.00pm are 45 minute services.
- The 4.45pm time slot is an hour service and includes a free recording of the service, this is priced at an enhanced rate to offset the overtime costs.
- Our busiest months for cremation services in 2019-19 were May, January, February, March and April



The service development programme

There has been plenty happening in Bereavement Services and there is more to come.....

When	Achievements
December 2014	New grave spoil management plan implemented
April 2015	New chapel waiting room with refreshments for customers (refurbished 2016-17)
September 2015	Electronic booking system – 24 hour online booking for funeral directors
December 2015	Front gates widened to give two-way access
June 2016	Lodge refurbished to give higher quality facilities for staff & customers & to enable new ways of working
December 2016	Crematorium toilets & waiting room refurbished for the public New pathway built to access copse
April 2017	Deep clean of cemetery chapel and refurbishment Extension of Shrubbery 32 (four seasons interment garden)
July 2017	Free public WIFI at the chapel and crematorium Live streaming of services at crematorium
Feb 2018	Refurbishment of operational staff welfare facilities
March 2018	New fencing to screen mourners at crematorium
April 2018	Cremator refractory repairs
February 2019	New litter bin points within cemetery grounds
April 2019	Installation of a granite plaque memorial tree in valley view
May 2019	Catafalque was dressed with new curtains and veil for added committal choice
May 2019	New logo for service created and adopted. Now used on our cremation transport urns and bags.
June 2019	The Bereavement services and parks agree that the operational workforce for haycombe cemetery is to be bought into the Bereavement service and managed directly, this takes place in June.
July 2019	New planters and hanging baskets are installed to soften and uplift chapels and office on site.
July 2019	Working with I.T. a new administration and registry system is to be procured which will include mapping of the council owned cemeteries and will provide a portal to the public for deceased searches.
July 2019	A P.I.D application is produced for new media delivery equipment for both the top and crematorium chapel. This will allow for high definition recording and streaming of services, also allowing for visual tributes to be requested. This will bring this service in line with our competitors and offer the bereaved greater choice to tailor their funerals.
August 2019	A BANES funeral poverty strategy to be drafted for the service and includes a BANES funeral plan open to the residents of Bath and

	North East Somerset.
Planned	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ More electronic transactions to reduce paperwork and improve customer experience ➤ 24 hour information line ➤ Appointment based system for customers in office ➤ Comprehensive FAQ's on website ➤ Increased memorialisation offer – ashes vaults, new benches both granite and recycled plastic, tree's, bulb scattering areas, 4 seasons planting ➤ Comprehensive landscape plan & forward planting plan ➤ New signage ➤ Renaming areas to increase attraction ➤ Bid for a new more usable and safer exit to be constructed at the crematorium chapel ➤ Carry out a feasibility study into the possibility of grave re-use in the council owned cemeteries considered closed ➤ Bid for funds to repair site roadways and paths ➤ Conversion of under utilized space ➤ Upgrade the crematorium apse and catafalque ➤ Create a dignified entrance to the crematory on the lower floor for deceased to enter that have had services in top chapel. <p>Create a strong service identity through signage, publications, website and uniform.</p>