



## **PURE CREMATION - INSIGHTS FROM THE PANDEMIC FRONTLINE**

*Covid-related cremations reach 35%*

*Collections from home, hospices and care homes increased from 20%-40%*

*Mortuary capacity trebles*

*Cremations increase 130% during 2020*

With Covid-related deaths sadly topping 100,000 last week, leading direct cremation pioneer Pure Cremation, has offered a first-hand account of the overwhelming pressures faced by the whole funeral industry and the steps their organisation has taken to keep up with ever-growing demand.

The funeral profession is described as the 'forgotten frontline', consistently overlooked during the crisis and once again stretched to its limit thanks to the significant surge in virus-related deaths over the past few months.

This substantial increase has been felt first-hand by Pure Cremation which as a national provider, has a unique perspective on the sheer scale of the Covid-19 impact.

The second wave of Covid-19 has exceeded the peak of the first, placing unimaginable pressure on the funeral industry. Since November 10<sup>th</sup> alone 50,000 deaths have been reported and experts from Sage suggest that a further 50,000 Britons could die in the coming weeks.

As the death toll continue to rise, new research says the number of funerals is 30% higher than normal for this time of year and mortuaries are currently reporting that there is zero capacity. This is exacerbated by the backlog at crematoria across the country, delays of up to five weeks for services mean that funeral firms are looking after the deceased for longer and many are struggling to accommodate new clients.

In preparation for the crisis, Pure Cremation had already invested heavily in their own Charlton Park Crematorium, near Andover. Originally built with a mortuary space for just over 100, the pandemic demanded investment over £100,000 in nearly trebling this capacity to provide dignified care for many more clients.

The crematorium initially had two cremators in operation and room to accommodate two more if demand grew. The sudden and continued demand unleashed by the coronavirus pandemic saw a third cremator purchased and installed in record time, at a cost of £600,000.

Catherine Powell, Customer Experience Director and co-founder of Pure Cremation commented: “In early 2020 it was clear that even with our ability to work longer hours than any other venue in the UK, we were going to need both extra capacity and greater operational resilience to serve the bereaved properly.

“While everyone hoped that a second wave could be avoided, we planned for the worst and ordered a third cremator, 9 months ahead of our original plan.

“This decision meant that we have been able to rise to the colossal challenge of the second wave. The numbers are simply staggering.

“During the first wave of the pandemic last year we carried out as many cremations as a busy local crematorium would expect to do in a year – just over 1,800. At its height we carried out more than 800 cremations in a single month.

“In the same period, we were able to help independent funeral directors provide timely care to more than 1000 bereaved families across the nation, in addition to the families who came to us direct. Altogether in this 5-month period we carried out more than 2,300 cremations – more than in the whole of 2019.”

Last year the Office for National Statistics reported that at least 26,000 extra deaths had occurred in private homes during 2020. Pure Cremation has experienced this first-hand, deploying more staff and vehicles in order to fulfil its promise of 24/7 response, anywhere within Mainland UK and Northern Ireland.

Whilst these urgent transfers from private homes, nursing homes and hospices have previously made up around 20 per cent of Pure Cremation’s instructions, 2020 saw this rise dramatically, almost doubling.

“Our immediate care team share the work of taking these calls, sometimes handling dozens of calls a night with most requiring urgent response. This in turn has massively increased the workload for our on-call operative teams”, Catherine continued.

“Last year we began with just one pair of operatives dedicated to covering urgent collections across England and Wales. This has risen steadily to four pairs to balance timely care for the deceased with safe working conditions for our drivers.

“The relentless increase in non-hospital deaths through every quarter of last year is reflected in the miles the Pure Cremation operatives have covered. Between April and June this stood at an incredible 237,627 miles but kept rising, with the October to December total hitting 262,659 miles travelled.

“We have had to boost resources and investment in every aspect of our care – from strengthening the crematorium team so we have three shifts for operating 24/7, trebling the size of our immediate care team to cope with incoming calls, doubling the scale of our fleet and driver team, trebling our mortuary capacity, purchasing thousands of coffins and renting a new warehouse to hold this stock until needed.”

And there is little end in sight. In November 2020, the proportion of clients with Covid-19 at the time of death stood at 15 per cent. This climbed rapidly to 25 per cent in December and currently sits at 35 per cent of the total number of cremations and January 2021 has seen the highest ever number of new funeral instructions.

Catherine said “Our team is absolutely exhausted but we’re so proud of their determination to offer the very best care to every bereaved family that turns to us. That means enduring very long days, many disturbed nights and supporting of each other when the going gets really tough. They really are the unsung heroes of this pandemic.”

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