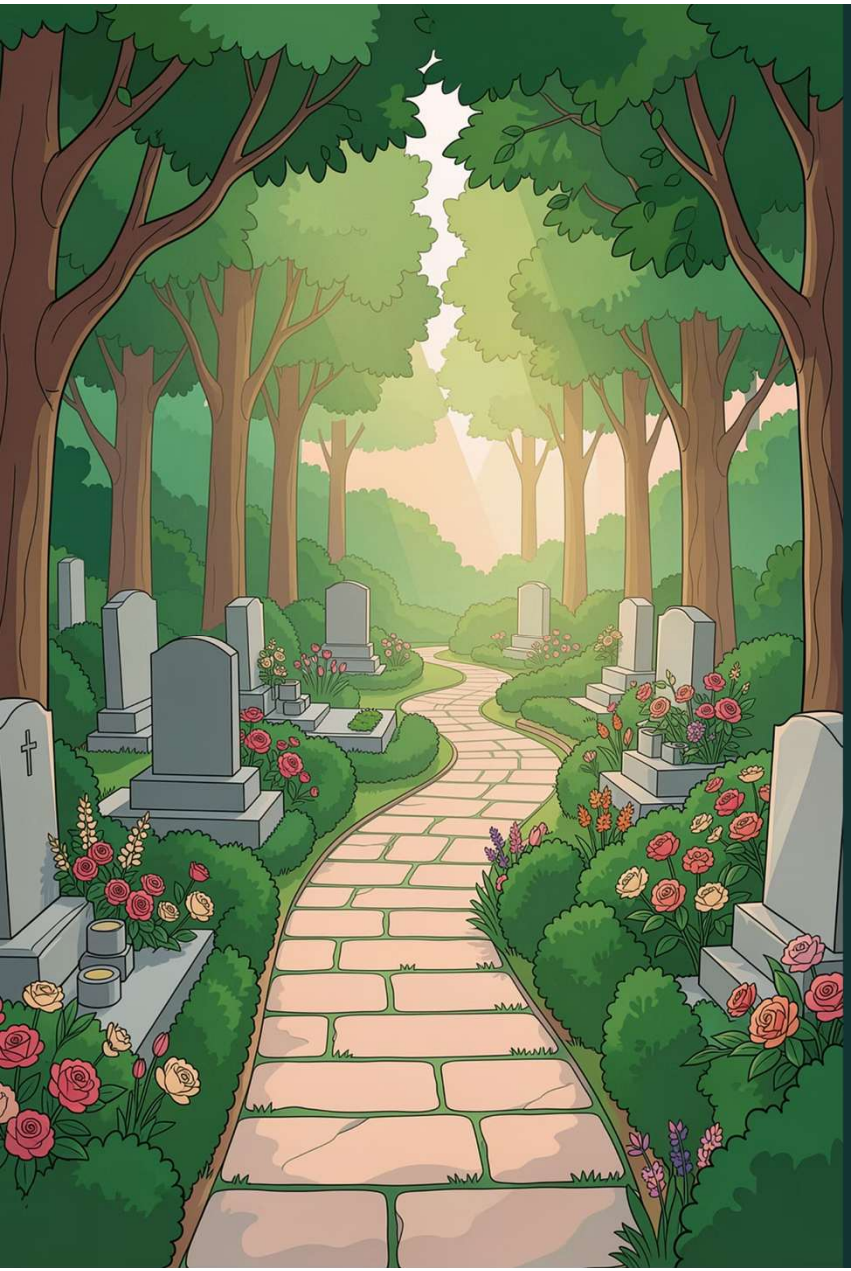


Bereavement Services Renewal Plan

A strategic five-pillar plan to modernise and improve Leeds City Council's Bereavement Service - delivering dignity, compassion, and value for bereaved families across the city.

PHASE ONE

2026–2031

Leeds CITY COUNCIL



Our Vision

Compassionate Excellence for Leeds

To deliver a diversified, modern and effective Bereavement Service that provides professional and deeply empathetic care, honoring lives and supporting families throughout Leeds with dignity and respect.

Why Renewal - and Why Now?



Leeds City Council operates three crematoria and multiple burial grounds serving one of England's largest city populations. Ageing infrastructure, rising demand, evolving public expectations, and the need for financial sustainability make renewal not just desirable - but essential.

Diversification

There's an opportunity to provide real choice to Leeds residents – expanding our assets and diversifying our operating model to provide additional services.

Rising Demand

Population growth and a changing and ageing demographic are increasing pressure on capacity, particularly on burials.

Expectation Gap

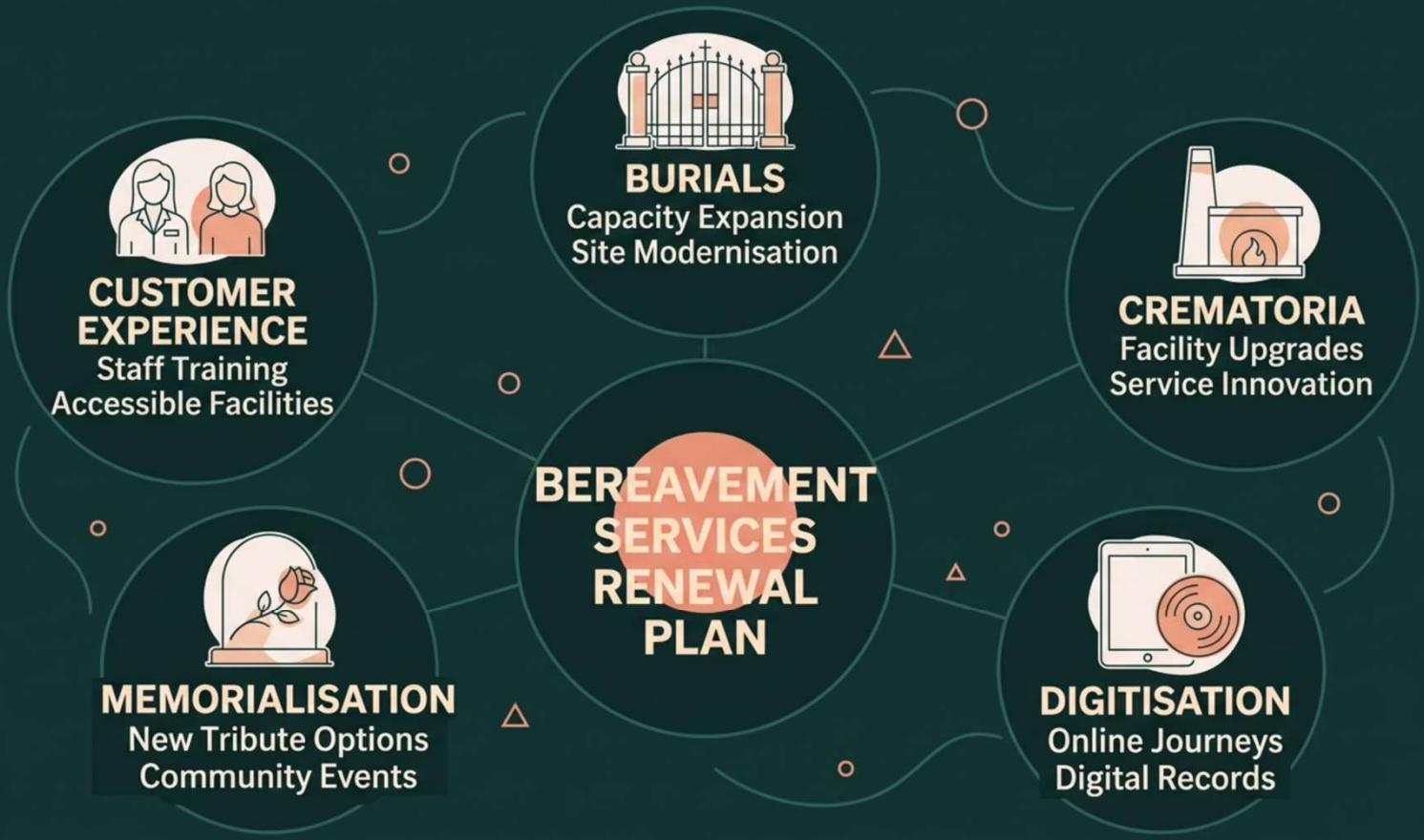
Bereaved families and our partners in the Funeral industry expect digital access, personalisation, and a compassionate experience.

Leeds CITY COUNCIL

OVERVIEW

Bereavement Services Renewal Plan: Key Pillars

Each renewal pillar represents a distinct workstream with its own scope, deliverables and accountability – together forming an integrated plan.



Leeds CITY COUNCIL

READACROSS

Aligning to the Council Plan

Delivering compassionate excellence through our Best City ambition.

The Plan directly supports the Council's ambitions for a Healthy, Growing, Thriving and Resilient Leeds, translating our city-wide strategy into meaningful outcomes for bereaved families.



Healthy

Supporting emotional wellbeing through compassionate, trauma-informed services at life's most difficult moments.

Growing

Creating a financially sustainable service model, with modern infrastructure and expanded memorialisation opportunities.

Thriving

Providing inclusive, accessible, and culturally sensitive services that reflect the diversity of Leeds communities.

Resilient

Future-proofing capacity, assets, and systems to meet rising demand and environmental standards.

From Strategy to Service Delivery

The five pillars of renewal — Burials, Crematoria, Digitisation, Memorialisation, and Customer Experience – ensure that the Council Plan is not just an ambition, but a lived experience for families across Leeds.

Leeds CITY COUNCIL

Plan Governance

Clear accountability structures ensure that decisions are made at the right level, risks are escalated promptly, and delivery remains on track throughout the plan lifecycle.

1. **Executive Sponsor**

   Chief Officer accountability. Champions plan at Executive Board and with Members.

2. **Plan Lead (inc. Deputy)**

   Day-to-day plan management. Coordinates workstreams, manages risk, and reports progress.

3. **Pillar Leads**

   One lead per pillar. Owns delivery, resources, and stakeholder engagement within their workstream.

4. **Renewal Plan Board**

   Cross-pillar oversight. Senior officers and pillar leads. Monthly cadence.



Key People

The dedicated team driving the Bereavement Services Renewal Plan forward, ensuring expertise and commitment at every level.

Polly Cook, Chief Officer, Climate, Energy & Green Spaces

Executive Sponsor

Lewis Wray, Head of Bereavement Services

Plan Lead

Andy Haley, Bereavement Operations Manager

Deputy Plan Lead

Jason Kaye

Burials Pillar Lead

Sarah Roebuck

Crematoria Pillar Lead

Claire Ripley

Digitisation Pillar Lead

Lauren Roberts

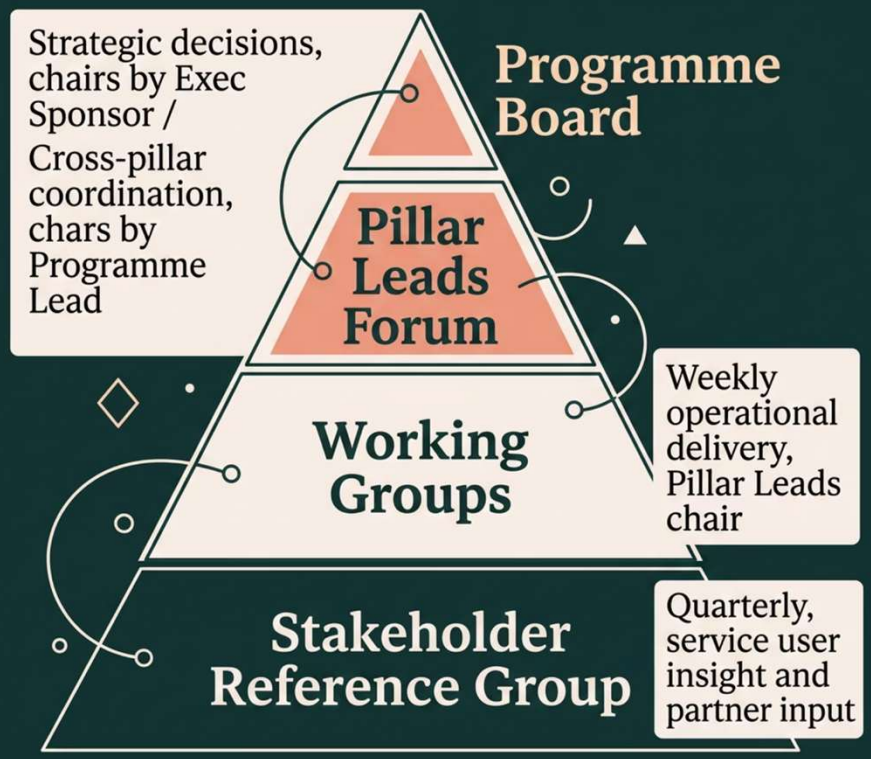
Memorialisation Pillar Lead

Jessica Hodgson

Customer Experience Pillar Lead



Meeting Structure and Governance Fora



Plan Board

Monthly. Strategic decisions, escalated risks, and budget approvals. Chaired by Plan Lead with attendance from Executive Sponsor. Attended by Pillar Leads.

Pillar Leads Forum

Fortnightly. Cross-pillar dependencies, shared risks, and progress updates. Chaired by Plan Lead.

Working Groups

Weekly. Operational delivery, issue resolution, and task ownership. Chaired by each Pillar Lead.

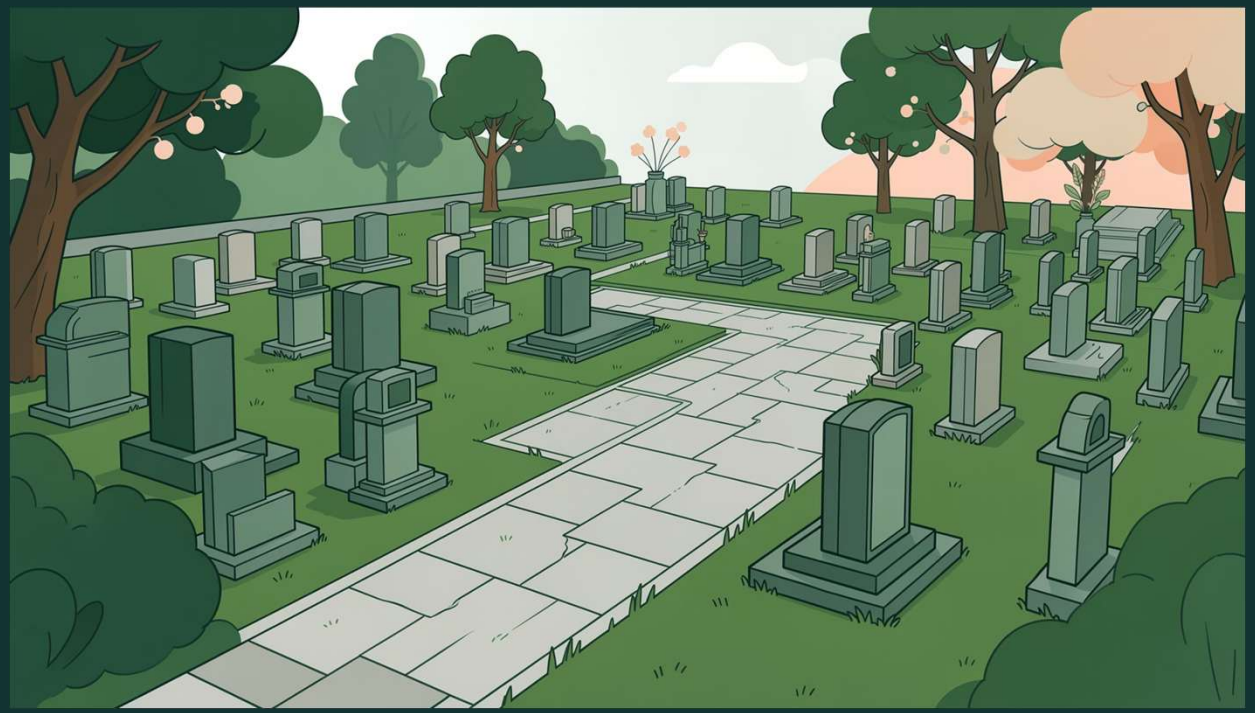
Stakeholder Reference Group

Quarterly. Funeral directors, faith groups, and community representatives. Ensures lived experience informs delivery.

Leeds CITY COUNCIL

PILLAR 1

Burials



Leeds manages a significant portfolio of burial grounds across the city. This pillar addresses long-term capacity, environmental considerations and equitable access for all communities - including faith-specific requirements.

Key Deliverables

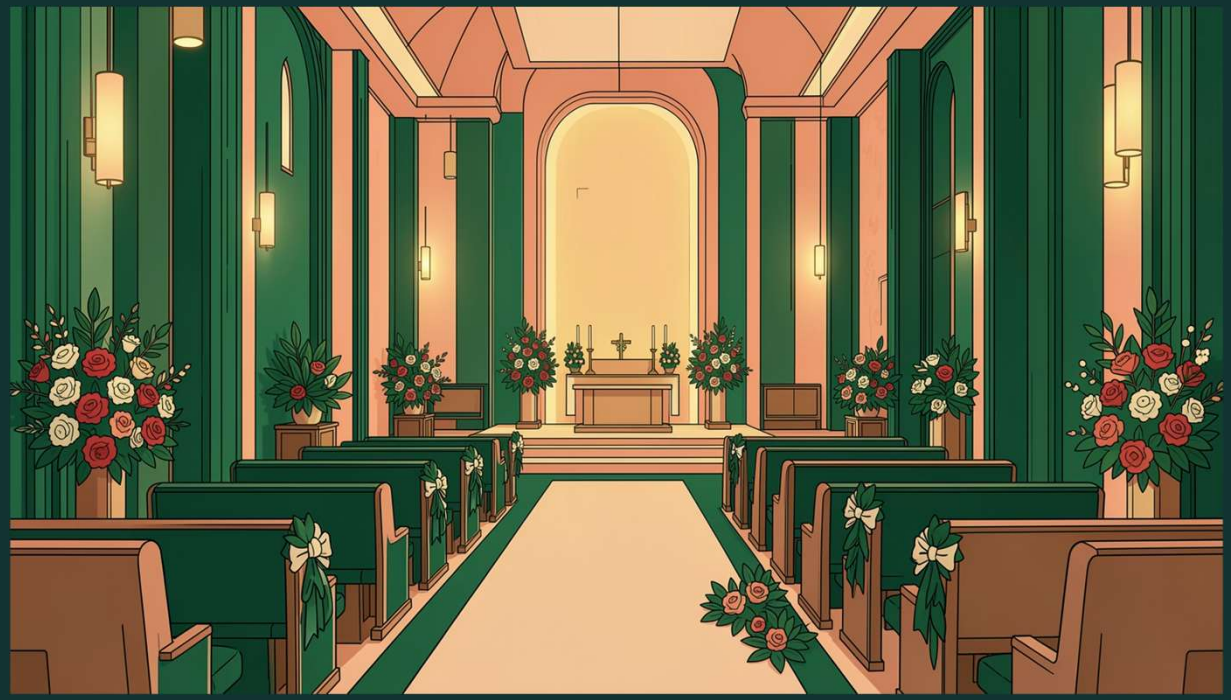
- Capacity audit and extension plans for existing sites, including Cottingley, Guiseley & Harehills
- Create a risk-based approach and plan for the management of large memorials, and a comprehensive testing program for all cemeteries
- Development of new burial provision to meet projected demand through 2075
- Improved maintenance standards and grounds management across all sites
- Faith and cultural burial sections reviewed and extended where needed
- Clear pricing strategy aligned to financial sustainability requirements

Leeds CITY COUNCIL

PILLAR 2

Crematoria

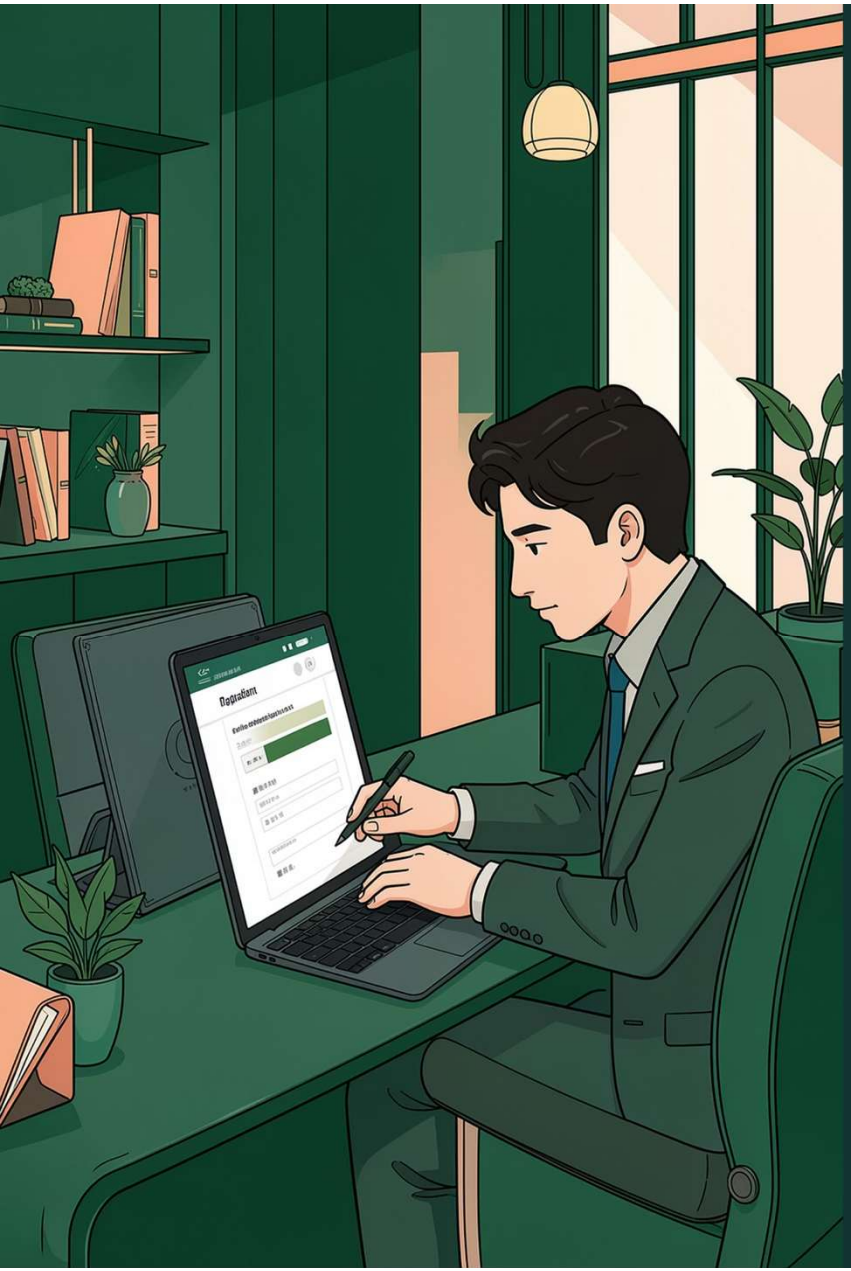
Leeds operates three crematoria - Lawnswood, Cottingley and Rawdon - handling approximately 5500 cremations per year. Chapel environments require significant and ongoing investment to meet environmental standards and family expectations.



Key Deliverables

- Phased investment in cremators across all sites to meet evolving emission standards
- Chapel refurbishment to create warm, dignified, and adaptable environments
- Improved audio-visual and live-streaming facilities for remote attendees
- Review of slot durations and scheduling to reduce family waiting times and meet their needs
- Feasibility assessment for solutions to address North/East Leeds demand

The associated action plan for this Pillar can be viewed here.



PILLAR 3

Digitisation

Currently, many booking, registration, and administrative processes rely on paper and manual workflows. This pillar will modernise the entire service - from first notification of need through to aftercare - reducing burden on staff and improving the experience for funeral directors and families.

1

Online Journeys

Self-service cremation and burial bookings, available 24/7, improved website and portals to create seamless experiences

2

Digital Records

Centralised, secure management of burial registers and cremation records

3

Integrated Systems

Single platform linking the public, funeral directors, and council teams

4

Data Insight

Real-time reporting on capacity, demand, and financial performance

The associated action plan for this Pillar can be viewed here.

Leeds CITY COUNCIL

PILLAR 4

Memorialisation



Memorialisation is a growing revenue opportunity and a deeply meaningful service for families. Leeds will expand the range of tribute options, creating lasting connections between families and their loved ones' resting places.

The associated action plan for this Pillar can be viewed here.

Memorial Gardens

Explore new dedicated spaces for ashes interment with planting and personalised markers.

Digital Memorials

Online tribute pages linked to burial or cremation records — shareable with family and friends.

Bespoke Products

Expanded range of memorial plaques, benches, trees, and keepsakes available to purchase.

Community Commemoration

Annual remembrance events and seasonal dedications across all sites.

♡ PILLAR 5

Customer Experience

At every stage of bereavement - from the first call to aftercare - families and funeral directors must feel supported, respected, and well-informed. This pillar embeds a customer-first culture across the entire service.



Staff Training

Bereavement awareness and trauma-informed communication training for all customer-facing staff.



Accessible Facilities

Improved waiting areas, accessible toilets, and prayer rooms across all sites.



Clear Communication

Plain-English guides, multilingual materials, and proactive aftercare communications.



Listening and Learning

Regular family satisfaction surveys and a structured complaints process feeding into continuous improvement.

The associated action plan for this Pillar can be viewed here.