

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

CENTRAL DURHAM CREMATORIUM JOINT COMMITTEE

At a Meeting of **Central Durham Crematorium Joint Committee** held **remotely via Microsoft Teams** on **Wednesday 27 January 2021** at **9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor N Foster (Chair)

Durham County Council:

Councillors D Bell, J Blakey, D Brown, J Chaplow (Vice-Chair), A Hopgood, P Jopling, H Liddle, S Quinn, A Simpson and J Stephenson

Spennymoor Town Council:

Town Councillors I Machin and D Ranyard

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from County Councillors K Corrigan and B Kellett, and Town Councillors B McAloon and C Sproat.

2 Substitute Members

Town Councillors I Machin and D Ranyard substituted for Town Councillors B McAloon and C Sproat.

3 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 1 October 2020 were confirmed as a correct record and would be signed and initialled by the Chair.

4 Declarations of Interest

There were no Declarations of Interest submitted.

5 Performance and Operational Report

The Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar, Graham Harrison asked Members to note the performance figures from 1 September 2020 to 31 December 2020 and the comparison to the same period for 2019, highlighting that there was a net decrease of 62 cremations year on year. It was noted there was a total of 735 for the three-month period with the September to December profile breakdown showing 201 from Durham, 29 from Spennymoor and 505 from outside of the area.

The Joint Committee were informed that, in respect of the new lower cost direct cremation option for the period 1 April 2020 and 31 December 2020, the Crematorium had carried out 28 unattended direct cremations and there had been no attended direct cremations.

Members were asked to note that the number of memorials sold had increased slightly in comparison to the same period the previous year, with sales being £6,039 more than the comparable period last year.

The Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar asked Members to note his thanks to all the Crematorium staff for their work during the COVID-19 pandemic, continuing to provide a high level of service to the bereaved and their loved ones. He added the staff were very experienced and had received specific training relating to the work of the crematoria, both Durham and Mountsett. He noted that an expression of interest for early retirement / voluntary redundancy had been made and therefore, to ensure that the service had robust contingency and resilience for the future, options for consideration would be presented to the next meeting of the Joint Committee.

Councillors were reminded that it had been noted at the September meeting that for the ninth year running the Crematorium had achieved the Green Flag Award and that an application for the 2021 award had been submitted and progress would be reported back to a future meeting. It was added that the management plan to maintain the required standards would be updated and any required works would be covered by existing budgets.

In respect of the Recycling of Metals Scheme, it was noted there had been two rounds of surplus nationally in 2020 and a cheque in the sum of £10,000 had been received from the Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management for St. Cuthbert's Hospice.

It was added that, due to COVID-19, arrangements had been made for the cheque to be passed to St. Cuthbert's Hospice, without the usual presentation by the Chair and Vice-Chair.

It was noted a copy of a letter of thanks from St. Cuthbert's Hospice was included in the report at Appendix 3. Members were informed that second round of nominations had now been made available and Antenatal Results and Choices had been nominated.

The Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar reminded Members that cleaning at the crematorium was provided by Durham County Council's Facilities Management team who provided the service by way of a Service Level Agreement (SLA). It was explained that the two year SLA had expired on 31 March 2020, however, due to the cancelled meetings in 2020 as a result of COVID-19 a revised SLA was not reported to the Joint Committee. He added that a high quality service had continued to be provided and Members were asked to consider and approve a revised SLA, as set out at Appendix 4 of the report, for the period April 2020 to March 2022.

The Joint Committee were informed of a new mandatory inspection scheme operated by the Federation of Burial and Crematorium Authorities (FBCA) to ensure standards of quality were maintained by crematoria. It was explained there was no additional cost for the inspection, it was included within the annual subscription fee. The Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar added that an inspection took place on 28 October 2020 and involved scrutinising six separate key areas of service delivery. He noted the Inspector found the crematorium complied with the key areas of compliance, that there was an excellent level of service provision, and did not feel it necessary to make any recommendations. It was noted the crematorium achieved a score of 321 out of 325, 99 percent, with a copy of the Inspector's report attached to the agenda papers at Appendix 5.

The Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar noted that unfortunately, due to COVID-19, St. Cuthbert's Hospice had been unable to provide a Christmas tree, as it had in previous years, to allow visitors to write a personal message and place it on the Christmas tree with a bauble. He added that St. Cuthbert's Hospice had requested that they be allowed to continue to provide a Christmas tree again in 2021, with the Hospice supplying the tree and decorations at no cost to the Central Durham Crematorium Joint Committee. It was noted no other requests from other organisations had been received.

The Chair thanked the Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar and asked for comments and questions.

Town Councillor D Ranyard asked if there had been any further progress in respect of the widening of the entrance to the crematorium site.

The Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar noted revised drawings were being prepared by the Council's Design Team and it was hoped works would commence in April 2021.

Councillor J Blakey asked as regards deep cleaning and the ongoing situation in respect of the electricity generator. The Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar noted the issue of deep cleaning, including some carried out by himself, and added the feasibility study regarding the placement of a backup generator had not been progressed as yet due to current COVID-19 situation, however, he would progress as soon as things eased.

Resolved:

- (i) That the current performance of the Crematorium be noted.
- (ii) That the current situation with regards to the staffing of the Crematorium be noted.
- (iii) That the continued success with regards to the Green Flag Award be noted.
- (iv) That the updated position with regards to the recycling of metals scheme be noted.
- (iv) That the Service Level Agreement with regards to the cleaning of the crematorium be approved.
- (v) That the compliance scheme report from the Federation of Burial and Crematorium Authorities, following their inspection of the Crematorium, be noted.
- (vi) That St Cuthbert's Hospice providing a Christmas tree again in 2021 be agreed.

6 Financial Monitoring Report - Position at 31/12/20, with Projected Revenue and Capital Outturn at 31/03/21

The Joint Committee considered a joint report of the Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change and Interim Corporate Director of Resources and Treasurer to the Joint Committee which set out details of income and expenditure in the period 1 April 2020 to 31 December 2020, together with the forecast outturn position for 2020/21, highlighting areas of over / underspend against the revenue budgets at a service expenditure analysis level.

The report further detailed the funds and reserves of the Joint Committee at 1 April 2020 and forecast outturn position at 31 March 2021, taking into account the provisional financial outturn (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Finance Manager, Neighbourhoods and Climate Change, Phillip Curran explained that the updated projected outturn showed a surplus (before transfers to reserves and distribution of surpluses to the partner authorities) of £978,197 against a budgeted surplus of £761,132, £217,065 more than the budgeted position. It was noted that details of the significant variances were set out within in the report, with an explanation set out from paragraph 12 onwards.

The Finance Manager, Neighbourhoods and Climate Change went on to advise that in terms of the retained reserves at 31 March 2021, they were forecast to be £1,546,351 along with a General Reserve of £517,770 giving a forecast total reserves and balances position of £2,064,121 at the year end.

Resolved:

That the April to December 2020 financial monitoring report and associated provisional revenue and capital outturn positions at 31 March 2021, including the projected year position with regards to the reserves and balances of the Joint Committee be noted.

7 Provision of Support Services 2021/22

The Joint Committee considered a joint report of the Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change and Interim Corporate Director of Resources and Treasurer to the Joint Committee which outlined the propose Service Level Agreement (SLA) for Support Service provision by Durham County Council to the Central Durham Crematorium Joint Committee for the period April 2021 to March 2022 (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Finance Manager, Neighbourhoods and Climate Change noted the one and a half percent increase to the fee reflected pay and price inflation and the details of SLA were set out at Appendix 2.

Resolved:

That the Service Level Agreement attached at Appendix 2 (including relevant schedule) for the year 2021/22 be approved.

8 Fees and Charges 2021/22

The Joint Committee considered a joint report of the Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change and Interim Corporate Director of Resources and Treasurer to the Joint Committee which set out details of the proposed fees and charges for Durham Crematorium for 2021/22 (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Finance Manager, Neighbourhoods and Climate Change advised that taking into account inflationary and cost pressures it was recommended that the cremation fee increased by £20 (2.8 percent) to £740 inclusive of medical referee, and environmental surcharge fees where appropriate.

A full schedule of the proposed fees and charges for Durham Crematorium was shown in Appendix 2 of the report, alongside benchmarking comparison data shown in Appendix 3.

The Finance Manager, Neighbourhoods and Climate Change noted a matrix set out at paragraph 10 of the report which indicated the extra income that could be received / budgeted with varying levels of assumptions on cremation numbers and fee increases.

The Chair thanked the Finance Manager, Neighbourhoods and Climate Change and asked for comments and questions.

Town Councillor I Machin asked as regards the budget being ran prudently and what would be done if the levels of cremation continued at the level greater than forecast as a result of the pandemic. The Finance Manager, Neighbourhoods and Climate Change noted that the last year had been very difficult in terms of the pandemic and therefore the budget would not be set looking at those numbers, rather the prudent levels pre-pandemic. He added that if the higher level of cremations did continue then the budget would be looked at accordingly.

Resolved:

- (i) That Members of the Joint Committee note and approve the proposed fees and charges at Appendix 2 effective from 1 April 2021, which seeks to increase the cremation by £20 (2.8 percent) per crematorium from £720 to £740.
- (ii) The proposed fees and charges are incorporated into the 2021/22 budget.

9 2021/22 Revenue and Capital Budgets

The Joint Committee considered a joint report of the Interim Corporate Director of Regeneration and Local Services and Corporate Director of Resources which set out proposals with regards to the 2021/22 Revenue and Capital Budgets for Durham Crematorium (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Finance Manager, Neighbourhoods and Climate Change noted the report incorporated the information from the previous items, the support services SLA, fees and charges and added that there would be the usual distribution of surplus to the two constituent Authorities and that the estimate of reserves at the end of March 2022 was approximately £2 million.

Resolved:

- (i) That the revenue and capital budget proposals contained within the report and appendices be noted and approved.
- (ii) That the forecast level of reserves and balances at 31 March 2022 be noted.

10 Book of Remembrance

The Chair noted Councillor A Hopgood wished to raise an issue and asked her to speak.

Councillor A Hopgood thanked the Chair and noted her thanks to the Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar and all the Crematorium staff for their hard work. She explained she had received a query from a resident in respect of a lack of access to the physical Book of Remembrance at the Crematorium. She noted March would mark the anniversary of the first deaths from COVID-19 and that access to the Book of Remembrance would be important for families. She noted access to the book had not been permitted for several months and asked if a facility in terms of safe appointments, with appropriate cleaning, could be instigated. She added budgets could be looked at and additional staff/costs taken into account so that the Crematorium could do all it could to help those that had lost loved ones.

The Chair noted that access to the physical book had been as a result of Government guidelines and there was the option in terms of the online Book of Remembrance.

The Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar reiterated as regards staffing levels and noted the schedule in terms of deep cleaning for the Crematorium.

He added he would look at options and report back if Members wished. Councillor A Hopgood noted she felt it was an important issue and that the increased revenue could be used to look to have a system in place as soon as possible. The Chair noted he, along with the Vice-Chair, would work with the Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar in terms of progressing the issue.