

## **DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL**

At a Remote Meeting of **Mountsett Crematorium Joint Committee** held via Microsoft Teams on **Thursday 28 January 2021 at 9.30 am**

**Present:**

**Councillor O Temple (Chair)**

### **Durham County Council**

Councillors A Bainbridge, A Batey, J Charlton, C Hampson and O Milburn

### **Gateshead Council:**

Councillors K Dodds, D Bradford (Vice-Chair), D Burnett, L Green, S Green and M Ord

#### **1 Substitute Members**

There were no substitute Members.

#### **2 Apologies for absence**

There were no apologies for absence.

#### **3 Minutes of the Meeting held on 7 October 2020**

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 October 2020 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

#### **4 Declarations of Interest, if any.**

There were no declarations of interest.

#### **5 Performance and Operational Report**

The Joint Committee considered a report of the Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar which provided an update relating to performance and other operational matters (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar reported that during the period 1 September 2020 to 31 December 2020, 485 cremations had been undertaken compared to 474 in the comparable period last year, an increase of 11. Further

details were reported in respect of Direct Cremations – Attended (no service) and Direct Cremations – Unattended (no service) and it was explained that during the period 1 April 2020 and 31 December 2020, 85 Direct Cremations – Unattended (no service) had been carried out and charged in line with the new charges introduced in April 2019.

With regards to the sale of memorial plaques, the number and value sold was 29/ £8,516 compared to 21 / £6516 in the same period last year, which was an increase of 8 / £2,000 year on year.

Moving on to discuss staffing, it was reported that staff continued to face additional pressures as direct result of COVID-19, however high levels of service had been maintained throughout and the Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar asked that his personal thanks to those staff be recorded. It was further reported that due a request from a member of staff to be considered for ER/VR, options would be presented for consideration by the Joint Committee to ensure that the service maintained a robust contingency for the future.

Moving on to regular updates, the Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar advised that an application for the 2021 Green Flag Award would be submitted as in previous years and any update on progress would be reported to a future meeting. In addition, with regard to the Recycling of Metals Scheme it was reported that collections in 2020 had resulted in an additional round of nominations being made available. As reported at the last meeting a cheque for £10,000 had been sent to Willowburn Hospice. The second organisation nominated was Age UK.

Moving on to operational matters the Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar provided details regarding the cleaning services agreement with Durham County Council. It was reported that as a direct result of COVID-19 the Service Level Agreement had not been reviewed in April 2020. However, the services provided continued to operate during this time and it was therefore now proposed that a revised SLA for the period April 2020 to March 2022, costing £7,722 per year be approved.

In relation to the replacement of cremators, the Joint Committee were informed that the temporary cremator continued to operate well and had been invaluable to the service during the pandemic. Recent emission testing of all three cremators (x2 ATI and x1 Temporary) had taken place and whilst the temporary cremator had passed, the two ATI cremators had not. Discussions were now ongoing with Environmental Health as to the next steps.

As discussed at previous meetings the order had now been placed for the two replacement cremators and it was expected that work would start on site on 1 March with an expected completion / handover expected by the end of September 2021.

In conclusion, the Bereavement Services Manager advised that The Federation of Burial and Cremation Authorities (FBCA) had implemented a new mandatory inspection scheme to ensure standards of quality were maintained by crematoria. Mountsett Crematorium was subject to an inspection on 29 October 2020. The inspector found that the crematorium met the 3 key areas of compliance, found an excellent level of service and provision and did not make any recommendations for improvement / action. A score of 321 out of 325 (99%) was awarded.

Councillor Temple added that as Chair of the Joint Committee he wished to say a big thank you to all the staff at the crematorium and having met some of the staff at a small teams meet up, he was extremely impressed by the staff's ongoing commitment and resilience to challenges faced.

With regards to the Green Flag application, he acknowledged that the team had won the award for 9 consecutive years and therefore queried whether the team given the current pressures felt that this is something that added additional strain to already stretched resources. The Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar advised that the maintenance of the open areas was part of the daily routine and no added pressure would be felt from applying for the award in 2021.

Councillor Bradford reiterated the Chair's comments and sincerely thanked staff for all of their hard work in ensuring that the crematoriums standards did not slip throughout what had been an extremely challenging time.

In relation to the cleaning SLA, Councillor Milburn commented that the cleanliness at the crematorium was always excellent and the level of service offered under the agreement was excellent value.

**Resolved:** That the Joint Committee

- (a) Note the current performance of the crematorium;
- (b) Note the current situation with regards to the staffing of the crematorium;
- (c) Note the continued success with regards to the Green Flag Award;
- (d) Note the updated position with regards to the recycling of metals scheme;
- (e) That the Cleaning SLA be approved;
- (f) Note the compliance scheme report from the F.B.C.A. following their inspection of the crematorium;
- (g) Note the update with regards to the cremator replacement

## **6 Financial Monitoring Report - Position at 31/12/20, with Projected 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 Resources

which provided details of the provisional outturn position for 2020/21 and the projected level of reserves and balances at 31 March 2021 (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Finance Manager Neighbourhoods and Climate Change provided a summary of the significant variances highlighted within the report noting that the projected revenue outturn was a surplus (before transfers to reserves and distribution of surpluses to partner authorities ) of £215,514 against a budgeted surplus of £441,680, £226,167 less than the budgeted position. The principle reason for this being the procurement of a temporary cremator in year which was not budgeted.

With regards to the earmarked reserves, it was reported that in line with the Reserve Policy, a transfer to the General Reserve of £11,813 was required. This resulted in a net transfer from the Cremator Replacement Reserve of £161,300. The Finance Manager Neighbourhoods and Climate Change therefore reported that the retained reserves of the MCJC at 31 March 2021 were forecast to be £435,066 along with a General Reserve of £298,328, giving a forecast total reserves and balances position of £733,394 at the year end.

**Resolved:** That the content of the report be noted.

## **7 2021/22 Revenue Budget**

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 proposals with regards to the 2021/11 revenue budgets for the Mountsett Crematorium (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Finance Manager Neighbourhoods and Climate Change explained that the 2021/22 budget had been developed with the Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar, taking into account the changes to Fees and Charges and the revised SLA as agreed in earlier reports, the 2021/22 forecast outturn position and known budget pressures in the coming year.

**Resolved:**

That the Joint Committee note and approve the budget proposals contained within the report and that the forecast level of reserves and balances at 31 March 2022 be noted.

## **8 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 proposed Service Level

Agreement (SLA) for Support Service provision by Durham County Council to the Mountsett Crematorium Joint Committee for the period April 2021 to March 2022 (for copy see file of Minutes).

**Resolved:**

That the Service Level Agreement for the year 2021/22 be approved.

## **9 Fees and Charges 2021/22**

The Joint Committee considered a joint report of the Corporate Director 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 the Mountsett Crematorium for 2021/22 (for copy of report see file of Minutes).

The Finance Manager Neighbourhoods and Climate Change explained that the report sought to increase the fees and charges as shown at Appendix 2 of the report by £20 (2.8%) per cremation from £720 to £740. Further small changes to fees were detailed within paragraphs 13 and 14 of the report, however, advised that the majority of fees would remain at the same levels as 2020/21.

**Resolved:**

- (i) That the content of the report be noted and that the proposed fees and charges be approved and effective from 1 April 2021, to include a £20 increase per cremation from £720 to £740.
- (ii) That the proposed fees and charges are incorporated into the 2021/22 budget.

## **10 Exclusion of the Public**

That under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraphs 3 and 5 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

## **11 Minutes of the meeting held on 7 October 2020**

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 October were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.